

ENGENDERING *BYT*: RUSSIAN WOMEN'S WRITING AND EVERYDAY LIFE FROM I.  
GREKOVA TO LIUDMILA ULITSKAIA

by

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Gender and *byt* (everyday life) in post-Stalinist culture stem from tacit conceptions linking the quotidian to women. During the Thaw and Stagnation the posited egalitarianism of Soviet rhetoric and pre-existing conceptions of the quotidian caused critics to use *byt* as shorthand for female experience and its literary expression. Addressing the prose of Natal'ia Baranskaia and I. Grekova, they connected the everyday to banality, reduced scope, ateleological time, private life, and anomaly. The authors, for their part, relied on selective representation of the quotidian and a chronotope of crisis to hesitantly address taboo subjects.

During perestroika women's prose reemerged in the context of social turmoil and changing gender roles. The appearance of six literary anthologies gave women authors and Liudmila Petrushevskaja in particular a new visibility. Female writers employed discourse and a broadened chronotope of crisis, along with the era's emphasis on exposure, negation, and systematic critique, to challenge gender roles. Both supporters and opponents of women's literature now directly addressed its relation to gender instead of using *byt* as a euphemism. From 1991 to 2001 women's prose solidified its status as a recognized part of Russian high literature. Liudmila Ulitskaia and Svetlana Vasilenko employed a transhistorical temporality that was based on the family and offered an indirect critique of history through representation of women's *byt*. Critics debated the relationship between women's writing, feminism, and the new divide between elite and popular literature. Depictions of *byt* in the work of Ulitskaia imply that the everyday is an artistic resource in its own right as well as a conduit to higher meaning.

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This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Mary Jo Sutcliffe, who first interested me in the topic of gender and everyday life.

## **1. Introduction: Engendering *Byt* in Soviet Culture**

### **1.1. The Gender of Everyday Life in Russian Culture**

Gender and *byt* (everyday life) operate as inherited topoi in late Soviet culture, stemming from tacit conceptions shaping these conjoined constructs and their relation within society. Functioning as two halves of an equation, they suggest that women are inclined toward the domesticity, childcare, and endless minutiae needed to support a family and constituting a major portion of the quotidian. Female authors after 1953 responded to the gendered vicissitudes of *byt* while moving from documentation to systematic critique of women's daily existence.

This study examines how women authors in the 1960s-1990s used everyday life first as an arena for discussing selected problems (1960s-1985), then moved from this tentative description to a more encompassing and damning assessment of how men's and women's lives differ (1985-91). In the 1990s female writers depicted the problems of women's daily life from a more artistic viewpoint. Five authors exemplify this shift from documentation to first broader and harsher criticism and then more stylistically sophisticated treatment: Natal'ia Baranskaia, I. Grekova (pseudonym of Elena Venttsel'), Liudmila Petrushevskaiia, Svetlana Vasilenko, and Liudmila Ulitskaia. The ending point of my study is Ulitskaia's receipt of the prestigious Booker Award (2001). My analysis focuses on how these authors appropriate the cultural space of everyday life as a venue for their commentary on often overlooked "women's" issues.

In the first, introductory chapter, I investigate how Russian culture engenders *byt*, how Russian conceptions of daily life differ from those in Western Europe, and how post-Stalinist

Soviet culture viewed the everyday and women's problems. At the conclusion of the third section I outline the ways my study differs from previous treatments of the topic, which tend to be less encompassing and do not as extensively examine the problems inherent in the everyday as a prominent theme in women's writing. The Introduction also contains summaries of the following three chapters and Conclusion.

The everyday is a problematic concept that Russian culture consistently links with women.<sup>1</sup> *Byt* is not only *povsednevnaia zhizn'* (daily life), but also a corrosive banality threatening higher, often intellectual aspirations—this quality distinguishes *byt* from more optimistic (and often utopian) Western conceptions of the quotidian. Vladimir Nabokov connects *byt* to *poshlost'*, the soul-killing realm of the crass and insensitive (309). In an even more sepulchral metaphor, Andrei Siniavskii compares Soviet culture to a pyramid: the grandiose grave of a hollow society whose time has passed (267). *Byt* is the sum of both those constituent parts, often seen as “women's work” (care for the self, care for others, maintaining a household), and the negative adjectives ascribed to them: petty, small-scale, mundane, exhausting, repetitive, and ultimately deadening.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For stylistic reasons I use “*byt*,” “everyday,” “quotidian,” and “daily life” as synonyms. The second portion of the Introduction, however, shows that Western and Russian conceptions of the everyday differ dramatically.

<sup>2</sup> Private life (*chastnaia/lichnaia zhizn'*), while a subcategory of *byt*, usually lacks the negative associations of the latter, broader term. Iurii Lotman's characterization of *byt* as our usual things and behavior suggests that *byt* encompasses *chastnaia/lichnaia zhizn'*, reversing Iurii Bessmertnyi's idea that *byt* is a category of private life (Lotman 10; Bessmertnyi 11).



Proponents of leftist radical change (Vladimir Maiakovskii, Vladimir Lenin) opposed *byt*, characterizing it as antithetical to progress. The myriad problems women confront daily reappear as a new set of crises effectively erasing previous accomplishments. The resulting ateleological and small-scale struggle sharply differs from traditional “male” activities. Masculine actions often involve sweeping claims to permanent change, whether through artistic apperception of reality, philosophical generalizations, or the USSR’s doomed attempt to build a Marxist utopia. The gender of *byt*, however, is feminine.<sup>3</sup>

Distinctions between masculine and feminine were also evident in Soviet iconography, dominated by (male) builders of communism creating cities or attempting to redirect the flow of rivers—all within the larger project of remaking civilization (Gillespie 5-6). While the male was proactive in culture (and policy), the female was assumed to be reactive and passive. Women were relegated either to supporting male-mandated efforts or to coping with the effects of state edicts on everyday life.

The implied passivity of reaction exists alongside a problematic corporeality (*telesnost’*). Both Russian and Western cultures deem women’s activity more physical than mental, unworthy owing to its reduced scale, ephemeral nature, and constricted existence within the home as gendered space (Cooperman 2; Goscilo 1992, 7). As Eve Sedgwick argues, the gendered equation of man/woman as “separate yet equal” quickly becomes the subordination of the female

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<sup>3</sup> “Gender” implies the often problematic significance society attaches to biological distinctions between men and women. For Joan Scott “[g]ender [. . .] means knowledge about sexual difference,” where knowledge, following Michel Foucault’s formulation, implies understanding produced by society (Scott 2). Knowledge reveals itself through everyday interaction, a realm of intense interest for both Scott and my dissertation.

by the male (9-10). This inequality was abundantly evident in the quotidian, which revealed the USSR's much-vaunted gender egalitarianism to be as illusory as its citizens' political freedoms. Even when the state wished to improve the status of women, assumptions that *byt* was female and derivative were impediments (Gradsikova 15-16).<sup>4</sup>

Culture sees the feminine as secondary yet crucial (Gilbert and Gubar 11-13). Within this schema, everyday life and women's activities are similarly overlooked yet fundamental to the unrelentingly banal task of survival. Survival implies a minimal state of existence, where higher, intellectual strivings (*bytie*) are forgotten in the face of a constant struggle to preserve home and self. While not all of Soviet life was so grim, during many periods (wars, famine, collectivization) the threat of non-existence (and thus non-*bytie*) was a large factor in *byt*.

The intelligentsia, while concerned with documenting everyday life and its issues, sees itself as fundamentally removed from both *byt* and the common people (*narod*). As Alan Pollard observes, two trends clarify Russian intellectuals' complicated relations to the everyday. First, early in its history, the intelligentsia as "bearers of consciousness" became a synonym of "enlightenment." This mandate to educate presumes an object that is neither enlightened nor conscious: the *narod*. Equally important for my analysis is how the more the intelligentsia became pessimistic over Russia's myriad problems the further it diverged from the common people and their quotidian (Pollard 19, 32). Concern with *byt* indicates how distant from many

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<sup>4</sup> Wendy Goldman argues that the state, particularly in the late 1920s and 1930s, responded to women's concerns by enacting legislation that attempted to curtail male irresponsibility (139). However, as Chapter Two discusses, throughout the Soviet era these decisions were made without women's input and significantly restricted their personal autonomy.

everyday problems the intelligentsia was: the act of describing implies both a degree of distance and the free time needed to contemplate and depict.

Both twentieth-century Russia and its intelligentsia existed in a nearly constant state of crisis. Vera Dunham notes how uncertainty and change increase demand for domesticity, a key part of *byt* (1968, 63). This expectation united both the intelligentsia and the state it often scorned. Sof'ia Petrovna in Lidiia Chukovskaia's eponymous novel (written 1939-40) attempts to preserve a normal home during the Stalinist terror, just as Soviet images of heroine-mothers characterize women's activities as a humble "second front" assisting the more prominent male military victories and massive industrialization drives. This subordinate/crucial status was especially pronounced during the Thaw's (1953-68) "legitimation of private emotions and lives," which built on the state's long-standing but ambivalent representation of women's efforts in *byt* (Woll 2000, xiii).<sup>5</sup> Both Joseph Stalin and his successors saw women's quotidian as complementing the elaborate rituals of public life. Within this context female success depends on an allegedly innate maternal instinct dooming women to the function of preserving what Barbara Heldt terms "little things," while men define great events and pronouncements that Western feminist discourse denounces as "universalisms" (1992, 169).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> In dating the end of the Thaw as 1968, I suggest that events in popular culture are more significant than in politics. While most US scholars see Stagnation beginning with Nikita Khrushchev's ouster in 1964, I follow the argument that Thaw patterns lingered until the invasion of Czechoslovakia, which, along with the trial of authors Siniavskii and Iulii Daniel' (1966), signaled a conservative shift in literature and culture.

<sup>6</sup> Rosi Braidotti defines this feminist target as "falsely universal pretensions," which must be challenged to investigate the experiences of women as a group distinct from men (203). For

The universal and everyday are antagonistic. While the former promotes consistency and stems from high/elite culture, the latter is inconsistent and closer to low/popular culture, what Raymond Williams calls “the culture actually made by the people for themselves” (Williams 199, qtd. in McGuigan 1993b, 164).<sup>7</sup> Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, critiquing universalism as an ultimately repressive Enlightenment ideal, claim that it stifles alternate meanings by standardizing inherently variegated human experience (7). *Byt*, for its part, continually resists such control. Mikhail Bakhtin characterizes the everyday as a mercurial foe of centralized meaning. His analysis, however, is more ambivalent when he discusses how the quotidian both enriches and threatens to overwhelm literature (1992, 270, 338).<sup>8</sup>

While the everyday is an otherwise diverse and uncertain realm, its gender is not in doubt. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar contend that the overlapping spaces of home and private life—essential to both the quotidian and contemporary conceptions of the individual—delineate

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critics such as Rita Felski, Bidy Martin, and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, recognizing diversity leads to addressing women’s problems, an assumption also central to post-Stalinist women’s prose—albeit without a feminist theoretical framework (Felski 157; Bidy and Mohanty 295-96).

<sup>7</sup> Henri Lefebvre terms this opposition a divide between the everyday and “philosophy,” where the latter tries to impose standardized truths based on an authority removed from the quotidian (1971, 12-13). Daily life, however, is as multifaceted as the popular cultures to which Ben Highmore and others connect it.

<sup>8</sup> Bakhtin diverges from Iurii Tynianov, who distinguishes the artistic quotidian (*khudozhestvennyi byt*) from true art (*iskusstvo*): *byt* controls the first term through the process of representation (Tynianov 19). Content dictates its own depiction, damning such literature to a marginal status Bakhtin finds refreshingly liminal but that Tynianov deems threatening.

woman as man's foil, prone to circular activity, limited in "natural" talents to seduction, procreation, and maternity (17). Women are the unseen prime movers of modernity, as Nancy Armstrong posits, establishing an undervalued yet key domestic arena within which the modern individual develops (1987, 8). Men, by contrast, rule the more prominent public domain, promote linear time, and lay claim to the *bytie* prized by Russian intellectual culture even as that culture describes *byt* from a lofty distance. Privileging *bytie* caused some of the intelligentsia to overlook *byt*, thus also overshadowing the non-linear and little-noticed female experiences dominating the everyday. Both female activities and their temporal context chronically escape notice, as critics in Slavic and English studies have observed (Heldt 1992, 169; Romines 17).

Women's intersection of time and space fundamentally differs from men's, a situation justifying a gendered reworking of the peculiarities Bakhtin ascribes to the chronotope.<sup>9</sup> The chronotope in women's writing forms around *byt* and its discontents, leading either to a magical ability to stretch resources and time or to the dire consequences of failure to do so (Gasirowska 1968, 11). If in literature "the image of man is always intrinsically chronotopic," for women writers this image means displaying the female in a state of crisis reflected through space, time, and their effect on the protagonist (Bakhtin 1992, 85).<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> This is not to say that Bakhtin was interested in feminism's attempt to liberate women from the repressive norms of temporality. As Caryl Emerson indicates, he was not invested in the de facto politicization of literature inherent in many gender-oriented approaches such as those of Felski (15-17).

<sup>10</sup> The chronotope of crisis is a less dramatic version of how Georg Lukács observes disaster shaping every moment in Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *Odin den' Ivana Denisovicha* (One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich, 1962). Temporality and details constantly present an "alternative

This chronotope of crisis, key to understanding temporality in the works of Baranskaia and Grekova (1960s-early 1980s), reaches its apotheosis in the otherwise quite divergent works Liudmila Petrushevskaia published during and after perestroika. These writers use a specifically female combination of time and space alongside stylistic and thematic commonalities rooted in everyday experience. Characters such as Baranskaia's harried Ol'ga Voronkova in *Nedelia kak nedelia* (A Week Like Any Other, 1969) and Anfisa in Grekova's *Vdovii parokhod* (A Ship of Widows, 1979) operate in a claustrophobic realm of reduced time and extended space as they race between jobs and chores. Such shared depictions parallel the shift from isolated documentation to systematic discussion of women's problems: the chronotope becomes a focal point for commentary on a quotidian that itself changed dramatically during the last four decades of the twentieth century.

## **1.2. Theorizing the Russian Quotidian: Ambivalence, Apocalypse, or Opportunity?**

Understanding women's literary depictions of everyday life is impossible without examining how Russian culture views the quotidian. The Russian conception of *byt* significantly differs from its Western counterparts, even when one excludes the gendered nuances accrued over the centuries. The European quotidian, Maurice Blanchot suggests, is an arena for escape from control, where individual choice redeems tedious materiality (13). Choice implies alternatives and a level of control over one's interactions with the external world and its power structures.

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between survival and succumbing, [where] every object is a trigger of a salutary or destructive fate" (Lukács 1970, 22). Comparisons between women's writing and camp prose suggest a multitude of thematic, stylistic, and narrative commonalities Helena Goscilo and Beth Holmgren explore (Goscilo 1989, 83-84; Holmgren 1994, 132).

For Michel de Certeau decisions in the everyday context are an opportunity for small-scale resistance and transgression, two possibilities important to Russian women negotiating economic difficulty and entrenched sexism (xix). Connecting the quotidian to an unruly and presumably female mob is a fear inherited from modernism, with its images of crowded cities, industrialized female workforces, and social unrest (Huysen 53). For Blanchot, however, the omnipresent possibility of disorder is liberating, not threatening.

This interpretation of the quotidian as an alternative to state control is especially appropriate for Russia, which lacks the enduring (if maligned) democratic traditions of the West.<sup>11</sup> Differentiating “strategies” from “tactics,” de Certeau perceives the latter as a tool for the less powerful.

A tactic insinuates itself into the other’s place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance. It has at its disposal no base where it can capitalize on its advantages, prepare its expansions, and secure independence with respect to circumstances. The “proper” [strategy] is a victory of space over time. On the contrary, because it does not have a place, a tactic depends on time—it is always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized “on the wing.” (xix)

While a “strategy” has its own “proper” space, a “tactic” must appropriate another’s area—this “poaching” echoes the potentially suspect nature Blanchot ascribes to everyday life. Russian women, inhabiting the liminal areas of the hospital, public transportation, and the line,

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<sup>11</sup> Here it is important to remember that *byt* comprises both *povsednevnaia* and *lichnaia/chastnaia zhizn'*. The latter terms reflect a private space supposedly free from the scheming and machinations of public interaction.

use tactics to operate in the public areas they frequent. The malleability and little rebellions women writers ascribe to daily routine hint at the iconoclasm of de Certeau and much French postwar social theory.<sup>12</sup> These female authors, however, did not wish to destabilize a society they deeply believed in: when the young mothers in Grekova's *Kafedra* (The Faculty, 1978) surreptitiously shop during the work day, this move is due to necessity not an incipient rebellion (1978, 110).

Unlike in the West, the intellectual tradition connecting the Russian everyday and resistance to cultural hegemony only dates from the 1990s. Before then the intelligentsia saw *byt* as at best an ambivalent zone and more often a barrier to *bytie*. This line of reasoning, which authors such as Ulitskaia challenged, assumes that the quotidian frustrates human endeavors: either agency is abandoned to a force beyond the individual's control or one becomes mired in petty problems that frustrate higher aspirations. Daily life does not promote independence, but at best creates a physical counterpart to the world of ideas (*bytie*). Iurii Lotman provides an apparently innocuous definition of *byt*.

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<sup>12</sup> Blanchot argues that indeterminacy equals potential for revolt. "[T]he everyday must be thought [of] as the suspect (and the oblique) that always escapes the clear decision of the law, even when the law seeks, by suspicion, to track down every indeterminate manner of being" (Blanchot 13). This formulation fits what Oleg Kharkhordin describes as Stalinism's approach to purging *lichnaia zhizn'* of its suspect counterpoint (*chastnaia zhizn'*) (355). Here Blanchot's conception pinpoints the tautological reasoning of totalitarianism: the state criminalizes the possibly suspect quotidian, which in turn becomes the locus for future transgression as perceived by the state.



Быт—это обычное протекание жизни в ее реально-практических формах; это вещи, которые окружают нас, наши привычки и каждодневное поведение. Быт окружает нас как воздух и, как воздух, он заметен нам только тогда, когда его не хватает или он портится. Мы замечаем особенности чужого быта, но свой быт для нас неуловим—мы склонны его считать «просто жизнью», естественной нормой практического бытия. И так, быт всегда находится в сфере практики, это мир вещей прежде всего. (1994, 10)

*Byt* is the ordinary flow of life in its real and practical forms. It is the things that surround us, our habits and everyday behavior. *Byt* surrounds us like air and, like air, is only noticed when it is spoiled or in short supply. We notice the peculiarities of others' *byt*, but our own escapes us—we are inclined to consider it “just life,” the natural norm of practical existence [*bytie*]. *Byt* is thus always located in the realm of practice, it is above all the world of things.

*Byt* is the world of the mundane and unnoticed, made invisible by omnipresence and its subordination to the symbolic cosmos of *bytie* (Lotman 1994, 10). The gap between *byt* and *bytie* reiterates the Western division between body and soul and their gendered equivalents, female and male. Likewise, this implied dichotomy of the soul/sacred/male and body/profane/female recalls Andreas Huyssen's attack on the modernist distinction between putatively masculine high and inferior (female) mass culture (47, 53). Lotman credits the quotidian with revealing deeper meaning within a culture, but his analysis does not speculate about how this insight relates to the social upheavals endorsed by de Certeau (Lotman 1994, 10).

The neutrality Lotman ascribes to the everyday is also problematic, implying that *byt* can be corrupted. This worry stems from a distinction Stephen Hutchings sees between Russia's "cultural *binarism*" and European "philosophical *dualism*," which results in a situation where "the neutral concept of 'everyday life'" is alien to Russian culture (Hutchings 38, italics in original). There can be no middle ground, whether between *bytie/byt*, male/female, or good/evil. Blanchot's chronic escape from authority and de Certeau's tactics would destabilize the semiotics of Russo-Soviet civilization, which does not allow for the moral vacuum of impartiality. In this context neutrality as threat is a key factor in critical assessments of post-1953 women's prose, in particular responses to Baranskaia's and Grekova's representation of the female quotidian.

As Hutchings argues, the early twentieth century provided some of the most serious attacks on the everyday. Roman Jakobson, never doubting that *byt* is the enemy of civilization, reiterates Maiakovskii's fears and makes explicit those concerns imbedded in Lotman's neutral assessment of the quotidian (Maiakovskii 182-83). Discussing the failure of the Futurist and Acmeist poets to remake Russian culture, Jakobson overdramatically identifies their foe as a "stabilizing force of an immutable present, overlaid, as this present is, by a stagnating slime, which stifles life in its tight, hard mold. The Russian name for this element is *byt'*" (277, italics in original). Perhaps exaggerating this concept's etymological and cultural uniqueness, he claims that "in the European collective consciousness there is no concept of such a force as might oppose and break down the established norm of life" (Jakobson 277). This assessment distinguishes *byt* from its more harmless component, *povsednevnaia zhizn'*. Equating *byt* with immobility and a threat to meaning takes on additional significance when one remembers that the

quotidian is the realm of women, who are needed to continue Russian civilization yet hinder the male-oriented “established norms of life.”

Jakobson’s dire formulation clearly diverges from Blanchot’s and de Certeau’s theories of everyday life as invigorating through chaos. *Byt* both frustrates organized efforts (troped as male) to understand or change existence and even negates previous progress. *Bytie*, in distinction, involves exceptional moments and people, having much in common with its rhyming counterpart, *zhitie* (hagiography). In the saint’s life higher meaning emanates from heaven, illuminating particular individuals and actions as exemplary. Women for their part have always been both central and suspect in Christian theology (Virgin Mary/Eve), an ambivalent status similar to their role as conceived by Valentin Rasputin and Pavel Basinskii: they either nurture or destroy Russian culture (Rasputin 169, 172; Basinskii 10).

Contradictions notwithstanding, everyday life is defined by what a culture (sometimes wishfully) assumes to be commonplace. This denotation raises the problem of typicality: the quotidian’s ability to point to its own essence, an image or character symbolizing the ethos of an era, whether or not the image is actually “average.” Such a conception continues a pattern central to nineteenth-century realism (the “superfluous man” as ideological type), which mutated during socialist realism. Katerina Clark notes how this resulting messianic male positive hero, like his predecessor, allegedly reflects the “typical” essence of his age—he, however, must struggle with the saboteurs and obstinate bureaucrats cluttering the landscape of Stalinist *byt* (9-10, 75-79).

Critics as diverse as Siniavskii and Nikolai Dobroliubov employed the typical to mine the quotidian for ideological meaning, attempting to dig beneath the continual frustrations of *byt* to identify and presumably transform the essence of Russian culture (Siniavskii 189; Dobroliubov 135). Both critics exemplify their respective eras’ attempts to see literature as social

consciousness, e.g., as a critique of the quotidian. Not surprisingly, these efforts failed. By its very nature the quotidian frustrates final answers, theoretical generalizations, and universalizing prescriptions endorsed by those intellectuals Gary Saul Morson labels “semiotic totalitarians” (1988, 7). *Byt* resists attempts to identify its essence or to use this posited core for ideological purposes.

The derivative connotations of the female and quotidian complement each other. Long considered devoid of serious talent, women, appropriately, are consigned to a “dead zone” where crass materiality has vanquished the reason and conscience deified by the intelligentsia. Because the female purportedly lacks great mental potential, critics such as L. Skvortsov assume her to be particularly vulnerable to the twin phantoms haunting literary representations of *byt: poshlost'* and *grafomanstvo* (bad writing) (26).<sup>13</sup> Such anxieties suggest the potential to negate the ideals

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<sup>13</sup> Svetlana Boym, following Vladimir Nabokov’s description, describes *poshlost'* as “the Russian version of banality, with a characteristic national flavoring of metaphysics and high morality, and a peculiar conjunction of the sexual and spiritual” (41). Combining opposites threatens the sound esthetic judgment traditionally claimed by the intelligentsia. Indeed, intellectuals unite these into the trinity of esthetics-morality-spirituality, a situation the author Sergei Dovlatov mocks when speculating that the Stalinist terror may have been caused by simple bad taste (1995 v. 1, 87). *Grafomanstvo*, the “uncontrollable obsession to write and to be a writer,” is to literature what *poshlost'* is to the intelligentsia’s sense of taste: an anti-esthetic potentially contaminating its antipode (Boym 168). Both labels often mask other intentions, as when V. Lysenko accuses Viktoriia Tokareva of promoting philistine values through ethical relativism (103). While the “real” transgression is not using literature as moral instruction, the critic’s explicit attack employs a phrase (*obyvatel'*) conflating suspect morality and dubious taste.

of high culture: the artistic becomes unintended farce, while the “second government” of the written word degenerates into meaningless scribbling. Both signal the revenge of *telesnost'* (the physical, *byt*) over *ideinost'* (the ideational, *bytie*). As such, *poshlost'* and *grafomanstvo* are anathema to an intellectual class whose crucial myth is the redemptive nature of the mental/spiritual triumphing over difficult material conditions. The above issues are paramount in the post-Soviet era, when the intelligentsia has discovered its redundancy amidst the harsh realities of a dramatically lowered standard of living for most Russians and a cultural context where commercialization and “low” genres dominate.

These concerns make studying the everyday contentious yet crucial to understanding how gender relates to Russian identity. Lotman was the first Soviet theorist to treat *byt* as neutral. Due to considerations of censorship, however, his work focused on the already ancient quotidian of the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries: everyday life was less a living (and potentially threatening) force than a collection of museum pieces. The Tartu School nonetheless created a valuable precedent for 1980s-90s studies of private life, the quotidian, and gender. Subsequent investigators such as Il'ia Utekhin and V. G. Nikolaev focused on the Soviet period, itself now doomed to the “enormous condescension” E. P. Thompson laments in history's treatment of events (Thompson 12).

For Soviet scholars *byt* was only safe when examined within the context of the past. Western intellectuals, by contrast, saw studies of everyday life as important because this field was a living process, free from what Fernand Braudel discredited as the “history of events” often obscuring the role of the quotidian and culture as historical agents (1972, 21). In the 1960s-70s the Birmingham School and advent of cultural studies canonized the contemporary quotidian as a

refreshingly interdisciplinary area for study in the humanities.<sup>14</sup> Foucault and Louis Althusser have suggested that this newly investigated sphere was also under various types of control, e.g., insidious ideology and the coercive creation of knowledge (Althusser 172; Foucault 27). However, scholars of gender, race, and a bevy of connected fields have continued to see studies of everyday life as an alternative to what they construe as limited and compromised normative history.

In the 1980s-90s feminist proponents of identity politics such as bell hooks appropriated the everyday to dissect how exterior forces and interactions constantly shape the individual's social significance (Bhavnani and Coulson 78-79). While Russian thought linked the everyday to immobility, Judith Butler and other Western intellectuals believe that it allows (and compels) one to negotiate a mutable sense of self (Butler 24-25). This fluidity may either heighten or lower susceptibility to state efforts to restrict identity, including gender. In the 1990s translations of Western theorists such as Foucault and Jacques Derrida and an upsurge in Russian interdisciplinary research made cultural studies (and analysis of the everyday) more familiar to academics in Moscow and St. Petersburg.

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<sup>14</sup> Stuart Hall characterizes interdisciplinarity as one of the Birmingham School's revolutionary approaches to assessing a situation where "cultural change lay at the very heart of social life" (14). Cross-disciplinary approaches also shaped feminism, which was first an activism-oriented and then an academic approach to gender inequality (Messer-Davidow 19). It is not a coincidence that studies of everyday life and feminism developed within institutional interstices: both responded to perceived oversights in traditional disciplines and were shaped by the liberationist dogma of New Left Marxism. A third factor, deconstructionism, also developed in the late 1960s-70s and challenged the binarism on which conceptions of gender were founded.

Beginning in the 1980s Western Slavists such as Richard Stites and Sheila Fitzpatrick examined *byt* both out of scholarly interest and to escape the strictures of Cold War investigations that overemphasized “top-down” politics and economics.<sup>15</sup> This move often entailed revisionist critiques of the Soviet state’s previously posited monolithic character. Indeed, Goldman, Stephen Kotkin, and Kenneth Straus showed how everyday life made distinctions between state and citizen counterproductive and often impossible. Likewise, as Sarah Davies suggests, the larger ideologies and interests attempting to regulate everyday life often obscure it from future historians (1). The shift in analysis from state policies to the quotidian made it easier to examine women’s experiences, which in the Soviet and post-Soviet eras lacked the prominence of political decisions.

### **1.3. Gender and Everyday Life in Post-Stalinist Culture**

The everyday is both a prolonged moment in the present and, as Scott suggests, a transhistorical category informing gender (27).<sup>16</sup> In order to better assess post-Stalinist culture’s approaches to *byt* and gender, it is necessary to briefly outline earlier attitudes towards the quotidian.

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<sup>15</sup> Susan Reid’s tellingly titled “Cold War in the Kitchen: Gender and the De-Stalinization of Consumer Taste in the Soviet Union under Khrushchev” and Karal Ann Marling’s “Nixon in Moscow: The Kitchen Debate” illustrate how studies of everyday life can provide insight into the highly visible political conflicts between the US and the USSR.

<sup>16</sup> Female experience became shorthand for Russia’s shameful backwardness, ignorance, and poverty in the face of European modernity (Gasiorowska 1968, 28). Women’s lives symbolized the antithesis of both the envied Western technological revolution and the Marxist-Leninist script for historical progress. From the beginning of the Soviet state the quotidian and humanity were

Lynne Attwood notes that state attention to everyday life viewed it as petty, mundane, and not a priority for ideational attempts to create a new society (1999, 173). The Bolsheviks, however, also recognized *byt* as a key part of what Fitzpatrick terms the “cultural front”: in this sense post-1917 society highlighted the conflict between female *byt* and male *bytie*, which had plagued Russian culture for centuries (Fitzpatrick 1992, 2; Hutchings 37).

*Byt* became an irksome indication of the revolution’s unfinished agenda.<sup>17</sup> Maiakovskii’s polemics against *poshlost’* and Bolshevik attempts to create ordered communal living signaled that women’s daily life as well as outside intervention could derail the Communist Party’s prognosticated utopia (Boym 34; Stites 1989, 190-222). While Lenin wanted to teach even the female cook to run the state, this idea vanished as conservative political and cultural norms supplanted the revolutionary chaos of the early 1920s.

*Byt* evoked the elemental struggles with materiality (famine, aging infrastructure) that hampered the promised march toward communism.<sup>18</sup> However, unlike the Civil War or a Five-

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obstacles to be rendered passive and feminine: transformed or simply destroyed (e.g., collectivization and the gulag).

<sup>17</sup> Before 1917 the Silver Age had conceived of the quotidian as a murky “anti-narrative,” with its multitudinous unpredictable problems hindering aspirations to higher meaning (Hutchings 7). Without remaking the female realm of everyday life there could be no escape from such spontaneity to the theorized utopia of consciousness, a “master plot” Clark ascribes to Soviet culture and its revision of the move from mundane to sacred in medieval hagiography (15-16).

<sup>18</sup> Rolf Hellebust re-examines how Soviet culture envisioned the mythical transformation of man into machine. This all-encompassing metaphor implies a basic distrust of the yielding and fallible



Year Plan, the everyday by its very nature contained the chronic “inconclusiveness” that, according to Bakhtin, frustrates attempts to regulate or transform it (1992, 31). *Byt* remained an intractable area of public life, contaminating its (female) denizens and perpetuating what Reid regards as a politicized association between “backward” females and an equally unenlightened quotidian (2002, 220).

While the first decade after 1917 emphasized the liberation of women from the old *byt*, Stalinism (1928-53) promoted women’s industrial labor while supporting the patriarchal family as the basic unit of society (Attwood 1999 171, 13). The state secured the private sphere, intervening to bolster what Oleg Kharkhordin identifies as the benign *lichnaia zhizn'* (personal/private life) while extirpating potentially treasonous *chastnaia zhizn'* (individual life) (343-44, 355). Such distinctions betrayed heightened government interest in a quotidian that, not properly subdued during the 1920s, now needed to be purged. While *byt* was still far from being a priority, it could not escape the state’s panoptic gaze. This attempt to watch over the everyday echoes what Blanchot believes is the modern state’s relation to a quotidian it distrusts as an “inexhaustible, irrecusable, always unfinished daily that always escapes forms or structures (particularly those of political society: bureaucracy, the wheels of government, parties)” (13). The most successful Soviet attempt to break down the boundaries between public and private was the communal apartment (*kommunalka*) with its ubiquitous and inquisitive neighbors (Kharkhordin 357; Field 99). For Blanchot, however, the twinned attributes of banality and incompleteness are virtues of the everyday, protecting it from an intrusive state. The quotidian’s

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human flesh linked with women, i.e., the sex inseparably intertwined with the problematic category of *telesnost'*.

banality represents an uncontrollability profoundly alien to Stalinist official culture's penchant for ritual, categorization, and control (Clark 9).

The cozy temporality of Stalinist private life was a feminized vision of the stasis dominating the (masculine) public sphere: the small-scale existence of the quotidian and a focus on the family constituted the private realm (Groys 110; Dunham 1976, 4, 34). Stalinism, however, made only a half-hearted effort to describe these as equal spheres. The era lauded visible heroines such as Olia in Boris Polevoi's *Povest' o nastoiashchem cheloveke* (Story of a Real Man, 1946), yet their primary function was to stand at the side of even more noble heroes (e.g., Vera Mukhina's 1937 "Worker and Collective Farm Woman" statue) or to perform as gifted daughters of the Father of the Peoples (e.g., Strelka as Stalin's child in the 1938 Mosfil'm musical *Volga-Volga* by Grigorii Aleksandrov).

In an ironic revision of base-superstructure cultural theory, the Stalinist woman (often the literal means of production as well as reproduction) was the base for the more visible superstructure of male civilization. Such an arrangement did not promote the sexual equality Marx and Engels ascribed to communism, which would vanquish discrimination as a vestige of capitalism (28-29). Instead, it continued the gendered *byt/bytie* distinction. According to Dunham, post-war society emphasized the quotidian as deserved comfort overseen by the "angel in the house" Gilbert and Gubar note in Victorian images of women (Gilbert and Gubar 22). This Soviet myth operated against a reality of continued shortages and hunger, which meant that a huge part of most women's identity was in the workforce, as the state reluctantly acknowledged when lauding the achievements of the USSR's numerous single mothers and widows (Attwood 1999, 161). However, the Manichean division of Stalinism continued to link female citizens to

the inner sanctum of a *lichnaia zhizn'* that, thanks to the authorities' vigilance, had been cleansed of suspect elements (*chastnaia zhizn'*) (Kharkhordin 355).

Such Thaw works as Vera Panova's "Mal'chik i devochka" (A Boy and a Girl, 1960), as well as the early stories of Baranskaia and Grekova, reflected the re-emergence of woman-centered prose and revealed *byt*, still troped as feminine, to be in conflict with the Stalinist world of great events and social change. Although Stalinism assumed harmonious relations between the conjoined opposites public/private and man/woman, Alexander Prokhorov and Josephine Woll suggest that the Thaw's increased scrutiny of *lichnaia zhizn'* discarded this assumption as one more instance of socialist-realist varnishing (Prokhorov 152; Woll 2000, 12).

The state had not lost interest in managing private life. Kharkhordin and Reid see a Foucauldian shift from direct intervention (purges and collectivization) to indirect control (advice manuals, more advertisements targeting women, and so forth) (Kharkhordin 357; Reid 2002, 217-18). Such a move is abundantly clear in the brochure *Ne veselo byt' meshchaninom!* (It's No Fun Being a Philistine!, 1965), where "[t]he [. . .] writer hotly and passionately exposes [oblichaiet] philistinism and philistines, their pitiful little joys and their sad lives" (2). Note a preeminent verb of the Stalinist purge ("exposes"): this usage, as well as publication by the Political Publishing House, signals a lingering state belief that the private is of concern to the state.

Grekova and Baranskaia, who emphasized private life in the 1960s, both benefited and suffered from this idea.<sup>19</sup> Depictions of *byt* and its discontents often coincided with state

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<sup>19</sup> Previous studies (Catriona Kelly, Thomas Lahusen) of these two authors begin with Baranskaia's best-known *Nedelia kak nedelia*. However, several earlier works created the thematic and stylistic precedents for this latter publication, e.g., Baranskaia's "Provody" (The

campaigns against alcoholism and other vices, a happenstance that increased the likelihood of publishing such “petty” subject matter (Zekulin 33-35). However, until the late 1980s authorities carefully controlled such discussions, barring most of the work of authors such as Petrushevskaiia from print.

The Thaw’s new expectations for material comfort, plus widened possibilities for critiquing *byt*’s shortcomings, provoked a re-evaluation of the everyday yet reaffirmed its status as a female realm. It is inaccurate to suggest that the era rehabilitated *byt*—as Dunham indicates, Stalinism never condemned the everyday per se, but did proscribe discussion of darker aspects of the female quotidian such as rape, adultery, and depression (Gasiorowska 1968, 185; Dunham 1968, 84). Thaw culture’s reinvestment in *lichnaia zhizn'* was guarded and circumscribed, sometimes revealing just as much with silences as with descriptions (e.g., the non-topic of domestic violence in *Nedelia kak nedelia*). Women writers benefited by both reacting to and influencing a tendency to selectively document *byt*—all of Tokareva’s stories were published (if with negative reactions), but several of Baranskaia’s and Grekova’s works languished “in the drawer” until *glasnost'* or later. These writers divided the post-Stalinist everyday into varying layers of accessibility and acceptability: e.g., Baranskaia’s discussion of male alcoholism was permissible to an extent, but description of its female counterpart would not have been.<sup>20</sup>

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Farewell Party, 1968) and Grekova’s *Damskii master* (Ladies’ Hairdresser, 1963). The 1960s, and by extension the Thaw as a whole, are thus key to my dissertation.

<sup>20</sup> Georges Duby argues that private life is a complex edifice, compelling researchers to navigate to the depths of intimacy at the heart of personal existence (31). While this formulation originally pertained to Western late medieval culture, its underlying meaning applies to the Soviet era.

During the 1950s-80s, however, layers of private life were determined by social convention more

Focusing on the private also reduced the scope through which Russians saw their culture: moving from Stalinist monumentalism to the Thaw's smaller focus revealed the cracks in the previously posited monolithic unity of everyday life (Woll 2000, xiii; Stites 1992, 140). As Bakhtin asserts, proximity to the subject of representation profanes the sacred, exposes flaws, and promotes fearlessness (1992, 23). This new close-up examination, while it sometimes recalled portrayals by such authors of the 1920s as Iurii Olesha and Mikhail Zoshchenko, was more somber than its earlier counterpart: much of the post-Stalinist attention to the everyday illustrated attempts to reconstitute families shattered by war and terror (Prokhorov 215).

Woll and Prokhorov note that private and public life did not coexist peacefully. *Byt* began to resemble the guerrilla warfare of Andrei Tarkovskii's *Ivanovo detstvo* (My Name is Ivan, Mosfil'm, 1963) instead of the ersatz domestic tranquility of such Stalinist films as Ivan Pyr'ev's *Kubanskie kazaki* (Cossacks of the Kuban, Mosfil'm, 1949) and the beginning of Mikhail Chiaureli's *Padenie Berlina* (The Fall of Berlin, Mosfil'm, 1949). In the quotidian's militarized context (when the rest of Soviet culture was being demobilized), women took on "masculine" characteristics: physical endurance, roughness. A shortage of men after the purges, collectivization, and three wars forced women to assume male roles glorified earlier during industrialization (Attwood 1999, 171). Decreased female university enrollment from 1950 to 1963 meant that more women found themselves occupying lower-paying positions (Reid 1998, 93). However, during the 1950s-80s some columnists argued that women brought on the "double burden" of both job and housework by futilely attempting to move from *byt* to *bytie*, from the

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than by physical removal from public view, as Utekhin, Boym, and Deborah Field suggest when describing the communal apartments in which most Soviets lived (Utekhin 13; Boym 74; Field 2).

domestic to the social sphere (Gasiorowska 1975, 19). This notion implied that such essentially “unnatural” transformations, alongside the incorrigibly weak male character, caused women to over-extend themselves (Tarkhova 122-24). At the same time, as Attwood illustrates, women rarely penetrated the masculine realm of management and received salaries less than two-thirds of men’s owing to the high number of unskilled female laborers (1998, 353).

During Stagnation (1969-84) sociologists, journalists, and authors warned of demographic trends threatening to make ethnic Russians a minority.<sup>21</sup> Within this discussion Baranskaia’s *Nedelia kak nedelia* was a timely if controversial illustration of why well-educated urban Russian women chose to have only one child. Women had little access to reliable reproductive information or sexual education materials, as Mark Banting, Catriona Kelly, and James Riordan show, despite the connections between lack of sexual knowledge and the divorces hindering birthrates (Banting, Kelly, Riordan 338-39; Madison 313). Private life yet again showed itself worthy of special state concern. The pretext was now racially charged assessments of a demographic change (falling Russian birthrates versus those of non-European Soviet republics) rather than Stalinism’s imagined enemies. The consequences were similar to the 1930s-40s in one important way: women were urged to abandon public life for an equally rewarding private existence that would safeguard the state’s future.

The shift in societal emphasis from the collective to the individual duties of women revealed a host of problems more often ascribed to the citizen-mother than to the state allegedly supporting her (Gradsikova 131). Single mothers and female-dominated school staff, critics

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<sup>21</sup> See Gail Lapidus’s discussion of this demographic crisis and the presumed culpability of single mothers, as well as Bernice Madison’s critique of the state’s (failed) attempt in the 1970s to persuade women to bear three children (Lapidus 129-36; Madison 315).

maintained, were mollycoddling (male) children.<sup>22</sup> This threat to gender roles, along with smaller Russian families, promised to change the complexion of Soviet society. Concerns over perceived blurring of male/female roles show how closely social interpretations of sex were connected to basic meaning in Russian culture and its Soviet incarnation. These axiomatic distinctions formed a set of fundamental binary oppositions, with Marxist-Leninist rhetoric (and its claim to gender equality) a superficial afterthought. While surface ideologies changed during and after de-Stalinization, Reid notes a conservative deep structure that prescribes rigid and enduring gender differences (1998, 93).

Post-Stalinist culture bound the female to the everyday and private, reminding women of their link to domesticity. After 1968, however, *lichnaia zhizn'* implied opposition to a public realm increasingly discredited by cynicism and inertia. Public life during Stagnation became synonymous with corruption and opportunism, while the intelligentsia perpetuated the myth of a private world divorced from such spiritual corrosion (Vishevskii 5; Boym 25). Intellectuals viewed the home and one's community of friends as a safe zone still suitable for expressing thoughts and emotions contrary to those promoted by the state (Boym 147-48).

Women, however, had little time for reflection. The much-maligned lines, primitive consumer technology, and deficit goods, especially outside of Moscow and Leningrad, made daily tasks connected with the home a seemingly petty yet vital struggle (Strelianyi 33). Russian

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<sup>22</sup> Marianne Liljeström surveys official fears during the 1970s of producing effeminate boys, concerns suggesting that this anxiety was part of a rigid set of gendered stereotypes (169-70). One of the authors of "How Much Housework Should a Man Do?" contends that overbearing women may emasculate their sons, a danger likewise perceived by Lina Tarkhova in a perestroika-era article ("How Much..." 11; Tarkhova 122).

males' notorious distaste for housework was frequently debated in the media.<sup>23</sup> For women, *byt* constantly encroached on the time needed for *bytie's* serious thought, whether through the humiliating need for political compromise or the prosaic difficulties of hand-washing laundry. Intellectuals, the chroniclers of the quotidian, were besieged by both a tainted public sphere and a private life that works by Baranskaia, Grekova, and Tokareva depict as offering little satisfaction: shortages, lack of time, and the corrosive relations between men and women made *lichnaia zhizn'* a problematic refuge. Field and Anatolii Vishevskii argue that informal groups and "honest" discussions provided an escape from the monotony of daily life, yet Petrushevskiaia will later depict these gatherings as a site of existential misery.

With the onset of perestroika such dissimilar authors as Rasputin and ironic feminist Nina Gorlanova show the image of *byt* moving from noisome wasteland to landscape of apocalypse. During Stagnation everyday life had been at the margins of official culture, dramatized in such ultimately reassuring accounts as El'dar Riazanov's *Ironiia sud'by* (The Irony of Fate, Mosfil'm, 1976) and Vladimir Menshov's *Moskva slezam ne verit* (Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears, Mosfil'm, 1979). After 1985, however, Soviets wearied by exacerbated shortages, economic collapse, and increasing disenchantment with politics found little respite in a private sphere that

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<sup>23</sup> In addition to Anatolii Strel'ianyi's discussion, see also Tarkhova, I. Ovchinnikova, and Baranskaia's surveys of the issue (Tarkhova 122; Ovchinnikova 21-22; Baranskaia 1988, 34). The irresponsible husband's contribution to the double burden is a favorite topic of Western Slavists as well (Kay 118; Wolffheim 1996, 172).



films such as Vasili Pichul's *Malen'kaia Vera* (Little Vera, Gor'kii Film Studio, 1988) envisioned as a microcosm of larger problems.<sup>24</sup>

If Thaw and Stagnation established the private and everyday as worthy of documentation and narrative, perestroika displayed the frequently horrific nature of *byt* to a shocked public. Petrushevskaiia proved to be most adept at dismantling the distinctions between the hidden and exposed areas that Erving Goffman maps in the self's interactions with others (22). With a maniacal obsession rivaling that of her characters, Petrushevskaiia exposed *byt*'s seamy side and destroyed the sacrosanct myth of the noble intellectual.

Previous decades had pointed to the possibility of private life's corruption by exposure to the morally bankrupt public arena. Now, however, members of the intelligentsia such as Elena Tarasova and Marina Karpova illuminated the darkest recesses of *lichnaia* and *chastnaia zhizn'*, even as the press highlighted the excesses of the political sphere during Stalinism, Thaw, and Stagnation. Little escaped the vigilance of the public gaze—perestroika searched for meaning through discussion and exposure. Public opinion began to exist outside of state control, as suggested by Cerf and Albee's collection.

This newly liberated opinion restricted the image of the female, partially in response to Mikhail Gorbachev's idea that woman should return to the home (Azhgikhina 2000, 60). Women, however, simultaneously became explicitly sexualized as pornography marketed along Western lines flooded into the USSR (Goscilo 1996a, 135-63). Gender substituted for an

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<sup>24</sup> Nancy Ries, Christopher Cerf, and Marina Albee document the crisis permeating private life during perestroika. Ries notes how shifts in national identity influenced speech patterns, while Cerf and Albee survey the often heart-rending reader letters to the weekly *Ogonek* (Little Fire) (Ries 3-4).

increasingly unappealing political ideology, a shift in allegiances Tat'iana Klimenkova links to women's exclusion from public life (161). As during the Thaw, a return to conservative gender roles proved to be one way of weathering massive cultural changes.

From the late 1980s the West (particularly the United States) saturated Russia with new goods. Beth Holmgren ties the subsequent backlash against imported products and ideas to Russians' negative conception of feminism, which with its funding for gender centers and grants had gained a tentative foothold in academic circles during the early 1990s (Holmgren 1995, 15; Goscilo 1996a, 12-13). Theory had little impact on everyday life and popular culture. From the standpoint of gender, perestroika was less a move forward than a quick leap backward to polarized images of womanhood: mistress and wife.<sup>25</sup> The era's vaunted openness and restructuring produced few positive gains for women.

The first decade of post-Soviet culture continued to link *byt* with both women and catastrophic change.<sup>26</sup> Troped as either Mother Russia or the demanding Western-style consumer

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<sup>25</sup> Nadezhda Azhgikhina discerns two images of women in perestroika media: the housewife and the beauty pageant contestant (2000, 60-61). This tendency continues in the post-Soviet advertising forming many consumers' images of everyday life (Groshev 331-43). Goscilo notes how Vladimir Kunin's novel *Interdevochka* (Intergirl, 1988) splits women's functions between prostitution and maternity, connecting the stereotypical essence of Russia to the latter's supposed redemptive function (1996a, 144-45). As Chapter Four notes, this dichotomy continued in post-Soviet prose.

<sup>26</sup> In 1996 a round-table of prose authors hosted by the high-culture "thick" journal *Voprosy literatury* (Questions of Literature) compared the post-Soviet era to Stalinism and the Civil War

found in commercials, woman as symbol was once again abstracted as state and advertisers removed her from the everyday problems that actually influenced the female population. This split image suggested that the female, the purported bedrock of Russian culture, was in fact a shifting network of signs.

Such instability was widespread during the volatile 1990s. For female citizens the Soviet era's double burden now worsened due to high prices, reduced social services, and job losses disproportionately affecting women and the intelligentsia (Holmgren 1995, 25). The post-Soviet state encouraged women's return to the home while countenancing economic hardship that made it impossible for them to remain unemployed.<sup>27</sup>

The transition to a market economy changed the position of both female and male authors. Beginning in the early 1990s a fundamental shift from high/elite to low/popular literature signaled the lowered stature of intellectual culture (Lovell 132-33). *Byt* in Lotman's sense of everyday objects now appeared in advertisements, mystery novels, and talk shows involving a broader spectrum of the population instead of only the intelligentsia and its viewpoints. The strong connection between this trend and commercialization calls into question

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in its treatment of intellectuals. Writers bemoaned a culture that marginalized the intelligentsia (and the act of reading itself) ([http://magazines.russ.ru/voplit/1996/1/xx\\_vek1.html](http://magazines.russ.ru/voplit/1996/1/xx_vek1.html)).

<sup>27</sup> Beginning in perestroika, women's job losses were much greater than men's, which resulted in a situation in which during the 1990s female workers were more likely to be underemployed or without work: by 1994, 68 percent of the registered unemployed were women, with women comprising 78.2 percent of the highly educated and unemployed (Sperling 150; Rimashevskaiia 247). Finding reliable unemployment figures for the 1980s (and before) is impossible, since, as Valentina Bodrova notes, the USSR only began gathering such statistics in 1991 (331).

whether these genres fit Williams's definition of a "popular" culture produced by and for the non-elites.

This marketing of the quotidian did not increase attention to women's issues—indeed, the female was now almost invisible in public discourse apart from a set of undesirable images (e.g., sexual plaything) (Azghikhina 2000, 61). The search for a new national identity, which emphasized large-scale issues such as economic collapse, war, and resurgent fascism, also obscured women's concerns. The success of Ulitskaia, Vasilenko, and others, however, made women's prose a recognized part of high culture even as female authors (Tokareva and Aleksandra Marinina) dominated the booming romance and mystery genres. To some degree the diversity of style and content in post-Soviet women's writing justifies the hope that a broadened concept of women in literature may become an enduring part of Russian culture (Goscilo 2002, 311).

#### **1.4. *Byt* and Everyday Life in Women's Writing: Building on Connections**

Since the 1980s Russian women's prose has received much critical attention. However, these analyses have either focused on one or two authors (Sally Dalton-Brown, Elisabeth Menke), considered literature as a realm removed from culture (Christina Parnell), or emphasized a single chronological slice of Russian culture (Monika Katz, Natal'ia Perova, Tat'iana Rovenskaia). No existing investigation offers a lengthy treatment of how post-Stalinist female authors' depiction of *byt* and private life reflects larger social contexts.

Studies of everyday life are inherently interdisciplinary, as Field, Utekhin, and Highmore suggest. Western Slavists are comparatively new to research outside the set boundaries of academe's branches. Adherence to discipline boundaries, plus the Cold War emphasis on policy-

oriented analyses, made it easy for the field to overlook *byt* even as it lay “hidden in plain view.”<sup>28</sup> Interaction with more theoretically savvy disciplines (cultural studies, gender studies, comparative literature) is changing the situation.

Many scholars discuss the influence of everyday life (Susan Kay, Barbara Heldt, Karla Hielscher), yet few speculate about how shifts in this cultural space effect literature. It is difficult to consider the development of authors such as Baranskaia or Ulitskaia without probing how and why their adaptation of a changing quotidian influenced theme, style, and how they adopted previous portrayals of *byt* in the works of Iurii Trifonov and others. Women’s writing initially appropriated a stringent adherence to verisimilitude. This mode of representation responded to the era’s demand for a documentary prose that, reflecting Nelly Furman’s conception, had conditioned the reader to see literature as an allegedly truthful commentary on life (49). This critique, limited to episodic issues in the works of Baranskaia and Grekova, became systematic in the prose of Petrushevskiaia, Gorlanova, and Vasilenko, and in Ulitskaia’s writing merged with conceptions of the everyday as an artistic resource.

Understanding authors’ treatments of everyday life is crucial to charting the transformation of women’s writing as well as gauging how critics reflected on authors’ approaches to the quotidian. During the Thaw and Stagnation, critics (e.g., Lysenko and Ia. El'sberg) employed *byt* as a codeword for women’s writing and its discussions of female experience. In the late- and post-Soviet periods, however, such mediated references vanished as

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<sup>28</sup> My phrasing is not accidental. Morson and Caryl Emerson developed American Bakhtin studies in a manner that closely connected this versatile thinker to the quotidian. In many ways studies of heteroglossia and the novel’s varied context are a form of everyday-life studies *avant la lettre*.

both supporters and opponents of women's prose explicitly invoked gender as a major criterion for literary talent (e.g., the misogynistic Basinskii and opportunistic feminist Mariia Arbatova).

This study attempts a sustained examination of how women's prose moved from documentation of the everyday to a first systematic critique of its inequalities and then to a more stylistically sophisticated and thematically diverse approach to describing *byt*, in particular in connection with the interrelated categories of family and history (e.g., the work of Ulitskaia and Vasilenko). This trend is inseparable from contemporary literary debates such as the split between Moscow/St. Petersburg and the provinces and the reduced post-1991 role of both the intelligentsia and its culture. My dissertation outlines how authors' changing conceptions of the quotidian formed the core and basis for reception of Russian women's writing during the last four decades of the twentieth century.

## 1.5. Chapter Summaries

Chapter Two argues that during the Thaw and Stagnation the posited egalitarianism of Soviet rhetoric and pre-existing conceptions of the quotidian caused critics to use *byt* as shorthand for female experience and its literary expression. Addressing the prose of Baranskaia and Grekova, they connected the everyday to banality, reduced scope, ateleological time, private life, and anomaly. Works such as *Nedelia kak nedelia*, *Vdovii parokhod*, and "Letom v gorode" (Summer in the City, 1962) relied on selective representation of the quotidian and the chronotope of crisis to hesitantly address taboo subjects (abortion, alcoholism, and so forth). Women authors justified their often gloomy depictions with a rhetoric of documentation and typicality.

Chapter Three investigates how during perestroika women's prose reemerged in the context of social turmoil and changing attitudes towards gender roles. The combined influences of *byt* prose, *drugaia proza*, and the appearance of six literary anthologies gave women authors

and Petrushevskaja in particular a new visibility. Petrushevskaja, Gorlanova, and others employed discourse and a broadened chronotope of crisis, along with the era's emphasis on exposure, negation, and systematic critique, to challenge gender roles. Both supporters and opponents of women's literature now directly addressed its relation to gender instead of using *byt* as a euphemism.

Chapter Four analyzes how from 1991 to 2001 women's prose solidified its status as a recognized part of Russian high literature. Ulitskaia and Vasilenko employed a transhistorical temporality that was based on the family and offered an indirect critique of history through representation of women's *byt*. Gender roles, including images of homosexuality, imply that authors have moved away from seeing male-female interaction as only a function of procreation and exploitation. Critics debated the relationship between women's writing, feminism, and the new divide between elite and popular literature. Depictions of *byt* in the work of Ulitskaia imply that the everyday can be an artistic resource in its own right as well as a conduit to higher meaning.

The Conclusion notes similarities between critiques of women's prose and those of post-Soviet popular literature. The success of Ulitskaia, rooted in a readable style and imaginative treatment of domesticity, suggests the potential of women writers to thrive in the new market economy.

## 2. Documenting Women's *Byt* during Thaw and Stagnation

From the early 1960s to the mid-1980s women authors selectively documented localized shortcomings in female everyday experience through *byt*. Natal'ia Baranskaia and I. Grekova, who exemplified this era's tendency to depict a gendered quotidian, appropriated post-1953 changing attitudes towards *byt* and *lichnaia zhizn'* to convey what they saw as episodic inequalities in Soviet society.

The first section of Chapter Two examines how Baranskaia and Grekova use non-linear and self-erasing time in conjunction with communal and liminal space. It also analyzes their relationship to what I term the "chronotope of crisis" as a focal point for commentary on the double burden and maternity. These two mainstays of women's prose stem from and perpetuate the divergent ethical standpoints that divide men and women in these authors' works, as the second portion of the chapter argues. Documentation (and its purported objectivity) as an overarching tendency links women authors to literary trends influencing literature of the 1960s-70s while also legitimizing the represented differences between male and female behavior. The chapter's final segment examines how critics treat authors' images of the everyday in order to classify *byt* as either impasse or opportunity, but always inseparable from women's experiences.

During the Thaw (1953-68) and Stagnation (1969-84) the USSR professed gender equality while displaying a series of imbalances that were depicted in literature. Despite the state's policy of hiding, distorting, or simply never gathering unfavorable statistics (such as those charting unemployment), some figures suggest marked discrepancies between men's and women's quality of life (Bodrova 331). After 1945 there were twenty million more women than men in the USSR—this gap, along with women's longer lifespan, made males a "deficit" item to



be carefully guarded if procured (Gradszkova 133). This obsession with the vanishing man had several results, none of which promoted stable nuclear families or, for that matter, gender equality. Over the span of two decades the divorce rate increased from 3.2 per hundred marriages (1950) to 27 (1973), with the husband's alcoholism blamed for 20-40 percent of divorces (Madison 311-12). In 1967 more than half of all marriages in Moscow ended in divorce, while one-third of Soviet women had extramarital affairs in 1969, a proportion that increased to half in 1989 (Gasiorowska 1975, 19; Gradszkova 93). Pre-nuptial attitudes help clarify this lack of connubial harmony: 70 percent of future brides believed that spouses should know everything about each other's plans, while only 21 percent of the grooms agreed (Matskovsky and Gurko 6).

A decrease in familial stability, along with overcrowded living conditions, may account for the USSR's high number of terminated pregnancies (Field 79-80). Bernice Madison cites 7-10 million abortions per year in the 1970s, while Sigrid McLaughlin notes an average of nine during a Soviet woman's life—abortion was the primary method of contraception for Soviet women (Madison 316; McLaughlin 1989a, 3). 81 percent of women questioned by sociologists had one or no children, a situation particularly exacerbated by the urbanization affecting Russians more than non-European ethnicities (Strelianyi 24).

It is more difficult to quantify another issue reflected in women's prose: violence against women. The scanty statistical evidence suggests that rape may have been fairly common: there were 17,658 reported rapes and attempted rapes in 1988, a 60 percent increase since 1961 (Kon 211). The number of cases not reported to the (usually unsympathetic) authorities was probably much higher. Drinking, another theme hesitantly depicted by Baranskaia and Grekova, periodically entered the public spotlight as a serious problem. 19.3 percent of male and 2 percent

of female drinkers in the early 1970s were alcoholics, conveying a gendered difference in leisure time and the social acceptability of heavy drinking (Segal 200-201).

Baranskaia and Grekova depict many of the above issues as defining moments in women's *byt*. The act of representation, however, either elides problems too risky for print (e.g., female alcoholism) or transforms "typical" moments (apartment squabbles, standing in line) into metonyms of women's existence.

Women authors themselves shaped and were influenced by the overall context of post-Stalinist literary culture (Holmgren 1994, 132). After Nikita Khrushchev's ouster (1964) and the Prague Spring (1968) official views on culture and politics became more consistently conservative. This change affected literature earlier than other forms of art (e.g., film) (Condee 162). The explicit anti-Stalinism of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *Odin den' Ivana Denisovicha* and Evgenii Evtushenko's "Nasledniki Stalina" (The Heirs of Stalin, 1962) fell out of favor: direct critiques of the recent past were no longer safe (Toker 52). Depictions of Soviet experience now focused on personal life, as in Trifonov's *Dom na naberezhnoi* (The House on the Embankment, 1976). These portrayals, operating through the reduced scope and quasi-direct narratorial discourse that marked literature after 1953, centered on the politically inert realm of the quotidian (Lowe 43). However, as critical responses to Baranskaia and Grekova show, *byt* and its representation continued to be controversial.

## 2.1. Women's Time and Space: Scale, Crisis, and Memory

From the 1960s to the 1980s depicting the specific problems of women's time was a key feature of the era's female authors. The peculiarities of women's temporality (self-erasing, ateleological time) are inseparable from gendered spaces (lines, the hospital, and so forth). For Mikhail Bakhtin this intersection of the temporal and spatial categorizes literature:

We will give the name *chronotope* [literally, "time space"] to the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature. [. . .] Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. (1992, 84, italics in original)

The chronotope is more than a confluence of time and space: this combination has its own life, centered on but not limited to its two main constituent elements. Bakhtin employs this category to group literature through characters' experiences (e.g., the chronotope of the rogue). Baranskaia's and Grekova's female characters inhabit a chronotope of crisis that becomes a model for women's battles with time and place in subsequent prose (particularly that of Liudmila Petrushevskaia). Women's temporality has a set of distinct attributes in these works: it is fragmented, cyclical, and self-erasing. These traits arise from *byt*, which magnifies problems while focusing on the details that are the hallmark of women's writing (Bukhantsov 10; Zhukhovitskii 246).

The scale of crisis distinguishes women authors from their male counterparts. Vasilii Grossman's *Zhizn' i sud'ba* (Life and Fate, published abroad in 1980) illustrates how Stalinism and the Nazi invasion threatened an entire society, while Grekova's *Malen'kii Garusov* (Little Garusov, 1970) describes the epic siege of Leningrad through the experiences of a single child.

The “little things” scrutinized by women’s prose imply an inductive approach to understanding life: these objects and actions are grounded in the banal details of *byt* and opposed to the deductive and often universal scope of male authors such as Grossman or Solzhenitsyn (Heldt 169).<sup>29</sup>

Fragmented time heightens the sense of intensity accompanying examination of crisis on a microscopic level. In *Damskii master* Grekova’s privileged Mar’ia Vladimirovna, dean of a Moscow scientific institute, makes little headway at work.

Научная задача требует себе все внимание, а оно у меня разорвано, раздергано на клочки. [. . .] Рваное внимание, рваное время. Может быть, его не так уж мало, но оно не достается мне одним куском. (Грекова 2002, 11)

A scientific problem demands complete attention, and mine is torn, ripped to shreds. Torn attention, torn time. Maybe there is a fair amount of it, but I don’t have it all in one piece.

This lament both reflects the pressures of the modern workplace and continues the battle with time inherited from such socialist-realist works as Nikolai Ostrovskii’s *Kak zakalialas’ stal’*

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<sup>29</sup> While *Odin den’ Ivana Denisovicha* connects *byt* to observations on the human condition, works such as *V krughe pervom* (The First Circle, published abroad in 1968) proffer philosophical assertions only loosely connected to the material conditions of the imprisoned scientists. The major difference between Solzhenitsyn and Baranskaia or Grekova is the female authors’ emphasis on gender as a depoliticized issue. Women are mentioned in *V krughe pervom* as either culpable reflections of Stalinist immorality or virtuous victims of the state. In Baranskaia’s *Nedelia kak nedelia*, however, Ol’ga is far from politics yet has a distinct set of problems arising from her functions as a mother and wife.

(How the Steel was Tempered, 1934). Mar'ia Vladimirovna, however, experiences temporality as a disjointed series of events instead of the continuous flow marking the construction projects that literally and symbolically remade the USSR. Unlike for the socialist-realist hero, there is no moment signaling the end of Mar'ia Vladimirovna's struggle: her immature grown sons and naïve young secretary need constant care. Likewise, while Ostrovskii's Pavel Korchagin focuses on a radiant future that will presumably redeem humanity, Grekova's scientist battles with a present moment and more modest goals such as assuaging angered colleagues and cooking dinner.

Grekova notes that she mentally worked on her fiction in fragmented fashion: between tasks, before sleep, and so forth (1982, 11). This common observation of women writers is a temporal equivalent of the literal and symbolic room of one's own, whose absence Virginia Woolf laments.<sup>30</sup> Writing during isolated moments may be one reason for the less lengthy literary forms (short and long stories) dominating women's prose (Goscilo 1992, 4). Fragmented time is endemic to the postlapsarian world where, as Georg Lukács suggests, humanity and its literature struggle to preserve meaning that is constantly under attack (1993, 84). However, for characters such as Ol'ga in Baranskaia's *Nedelia kak nedelia* the pressures of too many demands on too little time add a gendered nuance to shattered temporality.

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<sup>30</sup> In *Vremia noch'* (The Time: Night, 1992) Petrushevskiaia's graphomaniac Anna Andrianovna writes at night, a marginal time with Dostoevskian overtones of inner darkness. After completing all responsibilities, the woman writer is free to work on her own projects—Anna Andrianovna describes these through a suffocating rhetoric of maternity implying that all she does is for her family.

Fragmentation exists alongside exhausting cyclical action. Ol'ga, whom Helena Goscilo describes as waging a (losing) war with time, travels from home on the outskirts of Moscow to work in the city and then back again (1992, 6). This periphery-center-periphery movement challenges the spatial plot of socialist realism, which gravitated towards the centripetal foci of Moscow and Stalin (Papernyi 109). The week as temporal structure is also significant, implying that these troubles will be repeated. Indeed, Ol'ga none too happily observes in closing: “So another week is over, the next to last week of the year” (1981, 54). This suggestion of repetition and recurrent trials eerily resembles the conclusion of *Odin den' Ivana Denisovicha* and its enumeration of the days in the prisoner's sentence—Ol'ga, however, will never escape from her maternal duties. Cyclical nature eroding individual resolve defines *byt's* gloomy expanse.

*Byt* repeats its demands. Cooking, shopping, and cleaning are daily burdens. Baranskaia's Elizaveta Nikolaevna in “Krai sveta” (The Edge of the World) is retired but still lacks time to care for her shiftless relatives. On a morning resembling Ol'ga's week like any other she worries about the son who did not return home to his wife the previous night.

День был как день. Она приготовила завтрак, разбудила детей, провела зарядку, накормила и проводила в школу. Сбегала в магазин, поставила варить суп и компот. Занялась уборкой. Потом взялась штопать Петины носки для валенок. (Баранская 1981, 144)

The day was like any other. She fixed breakfast, woke the children, exercised, fed them and walked them to school. She ran to the store, put soup and compote on to boil. She did some cleaning. Then she began to darn the toes in Petia's felt boots.

The morning compromises a string of domestic duties rendered stark by short sentences, perfective verbal aspect, and few pronouns. As in *Nedelia kak nedelia*, a series of discrete actions

creates an aura of hurried typicality. There is only one escape from the race against time: the death that delivers Elizaveta Nikolaevna to the distant realm she longs to visit.

Shortage of time is one way *byt* unceasingly makes demands on Elizaveta Nikolaevna and other female characters. The constant need to adjust to the pressures of the quotidian evokes Judith Butler's assertion that "the substantive effect of gender is performativity produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence" (24-25). Cultural norms (e.g., woman as homemaker) implemented through everyday life shape the actions and identities of men and women. Female characters, however, struggle in what Roman Jakobson characterizes as the quagmire of *byt*: while Venedikt Erofeev's drunken Venichka ponders the meaning of life, Ol'ga changes diapers (Jakobson 277). Tasks and crises vary, but demands on women's time and effect on identity are constant and mundane in nature.

The wait in line to purchase often scarce food and goods, a familial necessity for Soviet women, forms a part of what Henri Lefebvre labels "pledged time" (1968, 53). One of Viktoriia Tokareva's narrators explains the bewildering transformations he sees after waiting to buy a Japanese umbrella. Looking at the line, he discovers something startling.

[Л]юди и вещи поменялись местами. Вещи вытянулись в длинную очередь и выбирают себе людей. А люди сидят в картонных коробках, в какие пакуют телевизоры, и, высунув головы, дышат свежим воздухом. (Токарева 2001, 139)

The people and things had changed places. The things had stretched out in a long line and were choosing people. The people were sitting in the kind of cardboard boxes that you pack televisions in, sticking their heads out and breathing in the fresh air.

“Iaponskii zontik” (A Japanese Umbrella) appears to provide a wry look at the ubiquitous shortages in the USSR. This initial level of interpretation—the humorous metamorphosis of buyers and sellers—reveals the light irony critics prized in Tokareva’s early (and better) works (Novikova and Novikov 57). As Anatolii Vishevskii suggests, there is a subversive undercurrent to irony in Stagnation culture (8). A closer examination of the story evokes Marx’s critique of capitalism’s reification, where there is a “conversion of things into persons and the conversion of persons into things” (209). However, the unsettling change occurs not in the exploitative West but during the period of Soviet “developed socialism.” Pairing the line as locus with wasted moments of human time implies loss of individual identity in a nation where the constant searches for basic necessities (or the luxury of imported goods) dehumanize the consumer.

The chronotope of the line (public space) parallels that of the communal apartment (semi-private space): both highlight unwanted social interaction as a part of *byt*. One of Grekova’s best-known works, *Vdovii parokhod*, chronicles the lives of five female residents of a *kommunalka* from the war years until the 1970s. The women come from varying socio-economic backgrounds, a trait uniting the communal apartment with the line. These differences and the confined space of the apartment create a state of permanent conflict. The intellectual narrator Ol'ga Ivanovna notes:

А вообще в квартире было беспокойно, все время на грани кризиса. Кто-то с кем-то всегда ссорился, враждовал: то Капа с Панькой Зыковой, то Панька с Анфисой, то Ада Ефимовна с Капой, да и с мной бывали столкновения, хотя я искренне хотела мира. [. . .] В квартирных битвах образовывались группировки, коалиции, заключались союзы. Коалиции менялись, как узоры в калейдоскопе, чаще всего по неизвестным причинам. Иной раз все



ополчались против одного. А бывали мрачные периоды всех против всех. Периоды мира всех со всеми тоже бывали, но редко, только по случаю особых событий. (Грекова 1986, 302-03)

In general it was not calm in the apartment; we were always on the brink of crisis. Someone was always arguing or on bad terms with someone: Капа with Pan'ka Zyкова, Pan'ka with Anfisa, Ada Efimovna with Капа, and even with me there were confrontations, although I genuinely wanted peace. [. . .] Groupings, coalitions, and alliances were formed in the apartment battles. The coalitions changed like patterns in a kaleidoscope, most often for unknown reasons. At other times everyone joined forces against one person. And there were also grim periods of everyone against everyone else. There were periods of peace among everyone, but these were rare, only because of special events.

The campaigns, alliances, and plots mirror the male-dominated epic of war or politics, yet exist on a small scale that exaggerates every gesture, remark, and action. Reduction of scope and magnified impact increase the chronotope of crisis's unrelenting pressure. One result is constant uncertainty and simmering anger, a realm of unknown causes, misinterpretation, and shifting allegiances exemplifying the spontaneity Katerina Clark sees as the problematic starting point in a socialist-realist novel (15). Grekova portrays this unenviable environment as the inescapable reality of Ol'ga Ivanovna and, by extension, the intelligentsia: once a piano player, she now yells in the kitchen and argues over who should wash the hallway. (Her role in the apartment's hostility is downplayed, with the unstated assumption that she as an intellectual tries to distance herself from the crass actions of her less cultured neighbors.)

Men are a largely absent yet problematic force in Grekova's image of the *kommunalka*. In *Vdovii parokhod* alcoholic veteran Fedor by his very appearance sows discord and jealousy among the women, a situation leading to tragedy: he falls under a tram and Anfisa blames herself (1986, 331). Il'ia Utekhin notes that, while men were initially the informal leaders of *kommunalki*, one respondent later pigeonholed this function as "broads' business" (110-11). The communal apartment, like the family, is an everyday zone men abandon to women when, as with Volodia in "Letom v gorode," they leave home to visit a lover or drink (Grekova 1990, 486-87).

The *kommunalka* is a female community that provides strife and animosity more often than support. Whereas Iuliia Gradsikova argues that everyday life provides examples of women's solidarity, Soviet living conditions demonstrated that sometimes loneliness was preferable to unwelcome contact with neighbors or colleagues (142). Crowded living conditions exposed private life and rendered it a topic for others' conversations (Utekhin 13). When Pan'ka's lover leaves her, the other "widows" debate his action without any clear demarcation between what may and may not be discussed in public (Grekova 1986, 313). Such distinctions are not operative in the communal apartment.

The rare moments of peace caused by overwhelming individual or collective tragedy (e.g., a husband's death) illustrate that the women are not inherently vicious, but simply react to the close quarters, frequent contact, and poor living conditions promoting strife. Anfisa and her neighbors show the unity that Gradsikova asserts is analogous to the camaraderie men experience under fire, where a larger threat or loss subsumes personal disagreements that otherwise divide individuals. War and everyday life are experiences common to all Soviets of Grekova and Baranskaia's generation. However, while the bloodshed of 1941-45 was often invoked to unite the USSR's citizens, the vicissitudes of *byt* divided them (Stites 1992, 98-99). *Vdovii parokhod*

suggests that the Soviet Union is one “big communal apartment,” a feminized metaphor that parallels the more famous comparison of the Soviet Union to a vast labor camp. While such an image would have been impermissible to convey explicitly in print, Grekova’s work incorporates this unflattering link by accessing the apparently insignificant realm of *byt*.

The hospital ward is another locus where time and space intersect through crises and forced interaction with strangers. After breaking her leg, doctor Kira Petrovna in *Perelom* (The Breaking Point, 1987) at first cannot withstand the pain and lack of movement (Grekova 1990, 150). The insufferable becomes bearable then routine, and she begins to notice the ward’s peculiarities. These are filtered through what Goscilo describes as the special burden of hospital time (1989, 83-84).

Удивительно, как сужается кругозор у лежащего в больнице! Точнее, не кругозор (круга нет), а нечто треугольное: стены палаты, потолок, дверь, окно. Каждая мелочь вырастает в событие. Кого-то поставили на костыли, кого-то выписали. Привезли новую больную... (Грекова 1990, 168)

It’s surprising how a stay in the hospital narrows your horizon. More precisely, there is no horizon, but instead something triangular: the walls of the ward, a ceiling, door, window. Any little thing becomes an event. They’ve put someone on crutches, they’ve discharged someone. They’ve brought in a new patient... .

The outside world has no meaning for Grekova’s patients—it has been replaced by a realm where “they” (doctors and nurses) control everything. As in the communal apartment, scale matters: the petty is magnified due to immobility, close quarters, and unavoidable contact. The woman’s freedom is restricted, except for the ability to think and worry about the home life she cannot supervise. These everyday anxieties distinguish *Perelom* from a work such as

Solzhenitsyn's more philosophically generalizing *Rakovyi korpus* (Cancer Ward, written 1963-67).

Most abstract moments in women's prose center on memory. The predilection for things past is not peculiar to female authors, but its mode of exposition is gender-specific. Memory is the only area where female writers approximate the large-scale aspirations of their male colleagues: *Dom na naberezhnoi* uses the universal experience of growing older (Glebov's chance encounter with a former friend) while *Zhizn' i sud'ba* depicts the horror of war as a portal to the past. Women's prose, in contrast, filters memory through specifically female experience. "Letom v gorode" assesses Stalinism through the consequences of the 1936 ban on abortion. While Valentina Stepanovna's suffering symbolizes the oppression of Stalinism, the link is understated, making the story acceptable for publication. The mother's experiences show that sometimes the personal is not itself political, as Nancy Armstrong notes, but parallels the political: Valentina Stepanovna lacks control over her reproductive health in a way that mirrors citizens' diminished political agency and civil rights (1997, 920). In both instances the state imposes the limits on personal autonomy.

"Letom v gorode" implies that an individual's sense of temporality structures the connections between memory and collective experience. This personal perception of time associates Valentina Stepanovna's inability to have an abortion with Lial'ka's birth and her plan to terminate her pregnancy many years later. There is an even more damning sense of parallels and repetition in Grekova's masterful *Svezho predanie* (A New Legend), written in 1962 but not published until 1995. Tsarist anti-Semitism, the Holocaust, and Stalinism exterminate the relatives of Konstantin Isaakovich Levin, the protagonist whose name simultaneously evokes Tolstoy's truth-seeking hero and Russia's Jewish population. Vera, Levin's mother, dies while

giving birth to Tsilia, named for a sister murdered in the 1905 pogroms (Grekova 2002, 50). Tsilia herself is killed in occupied Zhitomir after someone informs the Nazis that she is Jewish (Grekova 2002, 156). After the war, Levin's friend Iura is arrested because of his association with the "cosmopolitan" (viz., Jewish) science of cybernetics (Grekova 2002, 242-45). Explicit connections between Stalinism, anti-Semitism, and Nazi genocide made this work more politically daring than *Odin den' Ivana Denisovicha*. While "Letom v gorode" depicts an apparently ordinary mother-daughter conflict in order to mask its claims on history, Grekova's novel openly shows anti-Semitism to be a constant in Russian culture. The various temporal layers negate the possibility of progress for both Soviet Jews and humanity as a whole, thus problematizing a key tenet of Marxist-Leninist theory.

Like *Svezho predanie*, Baranskaia's *Den' pominoveniia* (Remembrance Day, 1989) relates past to present through grief and suffering. The author's only novel, *Den' pominoveniia* portrays widows literally and symbolically moving between memory and reality as they journey to the graves of relatives who died during the Great Patriotic War.<sup>31</sup> Memory conjoins present and past, yet Baranskaia's work suggests that it, too, is disjointed, with connections absent or willfully suppressed. *Den' pominoveniia* ignores the disastrous 1979-89 Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, where the very Russians who "lack the capacity to hate" nonetheless became the aggressors (Baranskaia 1988, 33). In this sense Baranskaia's novel peddles the era's official platitudes of peace. Recollection is not a solution to the fragmented and ateleological nature of

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<sup>31</sup> The designation "Great Patriotic War" (1941-45) is crucial: Baranskaia, like almost all published Soviet authors, elides the Soviet cooperation with Nazi forces from 1939-41 in Eastern Europe. This convenient oversight makes the author an unwitting apologist for one instance of genocide even as she vehemently protests the lingering horrors of another.

women's time—instead, memory reproduces unresolved tragedies within a timeframe that renders them less immediate but still painful.

Women's time and space combine a series of set locales (line, communal apartment, hospital) with a temporality of fragmentation, self-erasure, and repetition. While memory spans past and present, this bridge is formed by a grief and loss that challenge any lasting sense of progress. Whether describing everyday problems or national tragedy, Baranskaia and Grekova show that time and place destabilize rather than support their female characters.

## **2.2. The Vicissitudes of *Byt*: Defining Women's Issues in Women's Prose**

Documentary ambitions, an emphasis on *byt*, and the post-Stalinist reemergence of the private created conditions for the discussion of "women's" issues in officially sanctioned literature. Women's prose contains four interrelated topics of particular interest to my analysis: love, abortion, rape, and the cult of motherhood. While all these problems involved men, critics usually characterized them as belonging to the female sphere (domesticity, childcare, and so forth).

The search for love is a major topic in post-1953 prose. Nicholas Zekulin indicates that a woman's "right" to love, while an age-old expectation, was repackaged by late-Soviet culture under the rubric of personal happiness (43). This happiness, as Gradskova observes and Baranskaia's Ol'ga demonstrates, encourages marriage and children (Gradskova 101). Love, however, usually ends badly in women's prose. Often the conditions of relationships by their very nature promote inequality and male irresponsibility (if not worse). In Grekova's *Kafedra* (The Faculty, 1978), Nina's lover is a married alcoholic actor, who, while the father of one of her

three sons, also has another woman (1978, 23). Interestingly enough, Baranskaia and Grekova provide no examples of wives having affairs, suggesting a monopoly on fidelity that does not match sociological data.

Male culpability, women authors opine, comes from weakness. During an interview in 1988 Baranskaia summarizes her personal view, which colors male characters such as Shura's husband in *Nedelia kak nedelia*.

Our men are rather weak. Perhaps here the problem is that they have ceased to be the head of the family, they no longer feel the responsibility of feeding and clothing their family. Their wives receive as much, perhaps more money than they do. They feel aimless and take to drink. (1988, 34)

Men are disappointing and immutable, suggesting that it is women who must change. However, Baranskaia also deploys the traditional critique of the powerful woman in arguing that men, stripped of their traditional "rightful" role of leader, have now lost their purpose.<sup>32</sup> This attack on strong women reverses the pattern of the nineteenth-century superfluous man and his Turgenev maiden, where the latter's physical and moral beauty uplift the former from gloomy uselessness (Heldt 1987, 12). Now, Baranskaia implies, women's innate strength and willingness to suffer for others threatens and emasculates the men they try to aid.

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<sup>32</sup> Negative portrayals of powerful women are a mainstay of Russian literature, ranging from the headstrong Anna Karenina to the oversexed and murderous Katerina in Nikolai Leskov's *Ledi Makbet Mitsenskogo uezda* (Lady Macbeth from Mitsensk, 1866). Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have immortalized the figure of the sensual and violent woman by way of the unfortunate Bertha Rochester, the much-discussed "madwoman in the attic" (77-80).

Other thematic areas of Baranskaia's and Grekova's writing diverge more strikingly from literary tradition. Abortion and rape are two aspects of women's lives that Soviet literature only hesitantly discussed before 1985 in works such as Konstantin Simonov's wartime propaganda poem "Esli doroġ tebe tvoi dom..." (If Your Home is Dear to You..., 1942) or Boris Pasternak's *Doktor Zhivago* (1957). In women's writing both are described as either resulting from willed transgression or reflecting women's status as victims of fate. After *Kafedra*'s Liuda escapes assault by the fashionable Gena, her otherwise sympathetic roommate reproaches her—Liuda's behavior and actions "invited" rape (1978, 31-32). Here women's solidarity collides with gendered ideas of what is and is not proper behavior for a young woman. Those adhering to traditional roles deflect unwanted attention, as when Baranskaia's Ol'ga deploys the rhetoric of maternity to stop a young man from harassing her (1981, 15).

Rape and abortion underscore the lack of agency Grads-kova sees hindering Soviet women in *byt* (92). Women are a priori subject to male control and the potential for physical violence. Sometimes this control comes from the state: either through blocking or limiting access to decent health care and information (e.g., lack of effective contraceptives) (Kay 119). Baranskaia and Grekova depict abortion as a common problem. In an atypically risky political moment for Baranskaia, her Dark Liusa notes that she had an illegal abortion, while Ol'ga fears getting pregnant again (the birth of her daughter Gul'ka was not planned) (1981, 41, 21, 49). As a crucial part of state policy on reproductive health and fertility, discussion of abortion could not be banned from public discourse despite its unsettling implications: why would a woman not want to give birth in a country with no official poverty, legislated gender equality, and a caring state? The unstated answers suggest that these egalitarian ideals remained far from everyday reality.



Rape, however, is essentially absent from official discussion and both film and literature ascribed it to easily identifiable enemies (e.g., Nazi occupiers in Simonov's poem and *Den' pominoveniia*). There were a few notable exceptions, the best known of which is Mikhail Kalatozov's film *Letiat zhuravli* (The Cranes are Flying, Mosfil'm, 1957). Baranskaia's "Fotografiia Zoiki na fone dvora" (Zoika's Photograph with the Courtyard in the Background), while published in 1993, models morality little changed by perestroika. Zoika's "shocking" biography is the only feature distinguishing this post-Soviet publication from the author's earlier work. After she is nearly raped by a furniture collector, Zoika remembers the night her drunken stepfather sexually assaulted her.

Вспомнилась та ночь дома, когда мать дежурила, а к Зойке в комнату прокрался отчим и напал на нее, сонную. Она поклялась рассказать все матери, отчим же оболгал девчонку, сказав жене, что Зойка давно льнет к нему и держит себе бесстыдно. Вспыхнул скандал. Тамара поверила не дочери, а мужу. (Баранская 1993, 108)

Zoika remembered that night when her mother was on duty and her stepfather crept into her room and attacked her while she was asleep. She promised to tell her mother everything, but her stepfather lied, telling his wife that Zoika had been after him for a long time and was behaving shamelessly. There was a scandal. Tamara believed not her daughter, but her husband.

While the narrator clearly sympathizes with Zoika, this feeling exists alongside the story's disturbing moral, revealed after the incident with the furniture collector: women who behave decently are rewarded with marriage and children, while those who do not may be assaulted (Baranskaia 1993, 113). The rapist is not a blood relative, but a stepfather who, in this case, is

also an alcoholic. These factors allow the unrealistic assumption that under other circumstances sexual assault by older male relatives does not occur. Ascribing this action to marginal characters (Zoika's stepfather) or groups (German occupiers) removes it from *byt*, suggesting it is atypical. This divergence divides literature from the reality it tries to document: for Baranskaia morality is ultimately more important than verisimilitude.

Images of maternity also reveal a strong link between representation and ethics that is inseparable from conservative gender roles. The mother in post-1953 women's writing is the epicenter of the chronotope of crisis, a prism for national memory, and above all an icon of responsibility and self-sacrifice.<sup>33</sup> Baranskaia provides some of the few urban counterparts to the stylized maternal figures in country prose: those characters in *Den' pominoveniia* living in the cities and the less stoic but still self-effacing Ol'ga in *Nedelia kak nedelia*.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> This image comes from the Mother of God in Orthodoxy and Stalinism as its twentieth-century antipode. Richard Stites notes that the previously marginalized image of Holy Mother Russia reappeared on Soviet film screens to unify the population during the Great Patriotic War (1992, 114-15). The resurrection of this figure suggests that the state consciously acknowledged maternity as key to a gender system that served as a stabilizing ideology.

<sup>34</sup> The saintly mother looms large in this literary tendency. Solzhenitsyn's humble, barely educated, and ultimately doomed Matrena (*Matrenin dvor*, Matrena's House, 1959) typifies country prose's long line of impossibly idealized women. David Lowe links this type of idealization to the general tendency in country prose to create "cardboard" characters, where "women generally dwell in such shadowy realms as to be in danger of evaporating" (83). The stylized morality of Matrena and her ilk is antithetical to *byt* prose, which shows characters awash in a mass of daily dilemmas.

*Vdovii parokhod* provides the era's only insightful (published) look at the problematic consequences of sanctifying motherhood. Anfisa gives birth to her illegitimate son, and her future subservience is unambiguously foretold.

Анфиса кормила своего сына. Она вся переливалась в него, в своего хозяина. Никто никогда не был ей таким хозяином, ни Федор, ни Григорий, никто. Только Вадим. (Грекова 1986, 308)

Anfisa nursed her son. She overflowed into him, her master. Never had she had such a master—not Fedor, Grigorii, or anyone. Only Vadim.

This phrase both echoes the adulation of Stalin as *vozhd'* (leader) or *khoziain* (master) and implies a sense of independence that Russian culture tropes as male: *khoziain svoei sud'by* (master of one's own fate). Vadim's freedom will have dire consequences for his mother. Ol'ga Ivanovna believes that Anfisa suffers from maternal love, an illness the male doctors will never recognize (1986, 369). Grekova in this sense establishes a critical middle ground between the apotheosis of motherhood (Baranskaia) and its later merciless dismantling (Petrushevskaiia): *Vdovii parokhod* offers no final answer as to whether maternity helps or harms mothers, but certainly questions the redemption Baranskaia ascribes to it in works such as "Fotografiia Zoiki na fone dvora" (Goscilo 1994a, xxiv-xxv).

Baranskaia and Grekova present widows as a special subset of mothers. *Den' pominoveniia* blends two twinned images of what awaits the Soviet Turgenev maiden: maternity and widowhood. Russia, Goscilo argues, sees itself as a nation of widows, with this image more pronounced after the wars, collectivization, and purges drastically reduced the male population (1995a, 28). Within this charged context Baranskaia's depiction of Aleksandr Pushkin's widow, Natal'ia Goncharova, was quite controversial. Both contemporaries and successors pilloried

Goncharova for violating the unwritten widows' code: not spending her remaining years as a demure living monument to her husband (Goscilo 1995a, 30). Baranskaia "rehabilitates" Pushkin's widow, as one reader appreciatively noted after reading *Tsvet temnogo medu* (The Color of Dark Honey, 1982) ("O povesti N. Baranskoi" 99). This redemption occurs thanks to Baranskaia's none too subtly connecting Natal'ia with the Madonna (1982, 216, 222). The author thus employs one feminine stereotype (Goncharova as Virgin Mary) to counteract another (Goncharova as "merry widow").

Depictions of love, abortion, rape, and motherhood stem from traditional conceptions of women (sexual object, unit of reproduction), which Grekova cautiously critiqued (motherhood as illness) and Baranskaia largely upheld (the saintly widows in *Den' pominoveniia*). These long-standing ideas were exaggerated by the lingering post-war cult of masculinity, which was fueled by the lingering lack of men some fifteen years later as noted by Mar'ia Vladimirovna in *Damskii master* (Grekova 2002, 17).<sup>35</sup> In *Vdovii parokhod* this deficit leads to various women's machinations and to the pathetic coquetry of the neighbors over Fedor and even Vadim, while the narrator in Baranskaia's "Vstrecha" (The Meeting, 1993) has sex with a stranger based only on his uncanny resemblance to the husband she lost in the war (Baranskaia 1993, 39-41). This wish-fulfillment scenario, complete with one of the rare descriptions of coitus in the author's works, idealizes the male as strong and overpowering. This fantasy, however, only underscores the rarity of the eligible male.

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<sup>35</sup> Ewa Bérard-Zarzycka discerns three types of all-female communities after the Great Patriotic War: women who often appear asexual, sexually active "femmes-bacchantes," and menless women who fail to elicit male attention (148-51). *Vdovii parokhod*, she notes, is an example of the third category.

Men were also missing from families, and by the early 1980s women's texts depicted the financial and emotional stress this absence imposed on mothers and children (Zekulin 41). Women's writing in late Soviet culture gives several examples of the non-nuclear family that had been a crucial force in Thaw film and literature (Prokhorov 215). In Grekova's *Khoziaika gostinitsy* (The Hotel Manager, 1975), Masha and Vera raise Masha's baby, which conservative critic N. Naumova approved perhaps because Vera's husband is away defending the motherland (Naumova 96). *Kafedra*'s Liuda raises her illegitimate son with the help of friends, as does the nameless but smiling new mother in Vera Panova's "Mal'chik i devochka."

The work community acts as a parallel family for many women, including the fatigued but enthusiastic Ol'ga in *Nedelia kak nedelia* and Grekova's scientist-mothers in *Kafedra*.<sup>36</sup> (Recent studies suggest that less-skilled workers found their work not as rewarding, to say the least.)<sup>37</sup> Petrushevskaiia, however, in works such as *Vremia noch'* will destroy the idea of the intelligentsia's workplace as a surrogate family (at least in any positive sense). The resulting

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<sup>36</sup> Grekova's men also benefit from the atmosphere of a scientific workplace, particularly the type of secret institutions depicted in "Za prokhodnoi" (Beyond the Checkpoint, 1961). This intellectualized realm diametrically opposes the bleak hopelessness of the military town in *Na ispytaniakh* (The Proving Ground, 1967) where discussions of scientific work are overshadowed by descriptions of dead dogs, drinking, and the unforgiving steppe itself.

<sup>37</sup> See the descriptions of the women subway builders in S. P. Pozdniakova's "25 let v shakhte" (25 Years in the Tunnels), part of the groundbreaking collection *Zhenskaia sud'ba v Rossii: Dokumenty i vospominaniia* (The Fate of Women in Russia: Documents and Recollections, 1994).

void, Monika Katz asserts, robs her characters of the support network provided by stable families and amiable colleagues (1998, 190).

Praise of the professional woman was controversial given the traditional division between male/*bytie* and women/*byt* implicit in works such as Grekova's "Pod fonarem" (Under the Streetlight, 1963). During late Soviet culture columnists criticized women for entering the job market and thus, by their logic, provoking the double burden and robbing men of their traditional male role as providers (Tarkhova 122). Baranskaia's comments during her 1988 interview also imply that the career woman is symptomatic of the masculine behavior threatening the gendered binarism of Soviet society that Western scholars such as Marianne Liljeström identify (Baranskaia 1988, 34-35; Liljeström 164-65). This stance contradicts the narratives' endorsement of such successful women as Ol'ga in *Nedelia kak nedelia*: neither implied author nor characters can resolve the issue of women taking on a "male" role (breadwinner) while maintaining "female" duties (wife, mother).

Sometimes characters explicitly verbalize awareness of this awkward position. Grekova's Tat'iana Vasil'evna in "Pod fonarem" is a self-professed bad housekeeper who focuses on scientific work instead of being feminine: "She was not a woman by profession. Just as one can not speak French or English, she did not speak the language of women" (1990, 539). Here "language" is a medium for both communication (speech) and the ideas and attitudes being transferred (conceptions of gender).<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> The context of communication is fundamental to linguistics and semiotics, as Iurii Lotman posits when defining language as "a code plus its history" (2001, 15). Words receive meaning from the way in which they are used, presupposing that language and literature are never "just words," but always convey meaning conditioned by society (e.g., gender).

In reality, however, women simply had no choice: low wages meant that most Soviet families needed to have two incomes, a problem depicted by Baranskaia and Grekova in the single mothers who struggle with the double burden.<sup>39</sup> Lynne Attwood argues that another cause of the double burden dates from the 1920s, when Bolshevik feminists such as Aleksandra Kollontai failed to challenge the idea that housework constituted sexual inequality—this retreat meant that the state believed that it did not owe its female citizens a replacement for the failed communal laundries, cafeterias, and so forth (1999, 173). Anatolii Strel'ianyi blames a lack of male help at home, as well as technology geared to industry instead of the consumer sector (33). Baranskaia's Ol'ga for her part never questions why neither husband nor government takes more interest in her problems (Jonscher 163). Her acceptance of the status quo accompanies what Tat'iana Rovenskaia notes as a gendered guilt felt by women when not meeting obligations that they cannot fulfill without more state support (Rovenskaia 1999, 221; Gradskaia 131).<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> See Ekaterina Alexandrova's discussion of economic disparity as a factor that necessitated marriage and the double burden (49-50).

<sup>40</sup> There are more acerbic discussions of gender relations. In 1979 Tat'iana Mamonova edited an underground almanac that later served as one of the sources for the English-language volume *Women and Russia* (1984), in which the birth of Soviet-era feminism was ascribed to the allegedly broad-based work of Mamonova's organization. For Mamonova, feminism signified an organized approach to social problems affecting women. However, Natasha Kolchevska notes that KGB intimidation, internal dissension, and lack of broad support prevented Mamonova's group from attaining lasting influence (Kolchevska 2001a, 182). The fictional and documentary works by Iuliia Voznesenskaia, one of the group's members, were more successful. Her *Zhenskii dekameron* (Women's Decameron, 1987) and *Zvezda Chernobyl'* (The Star Chernobyl, 1987)

Within this context successful professional women were an anomaly: in Vladimir Menshov's film *Moskva slezam ne verit* single mother Katia, through hard work and state support, becomes a factory director, just as Mar'ia Vladimirovna in Grekova's *Damskii master* reaches the position of dean. Sometimes these exceptional women are unwelcome: Mar'ia Vladimirovna's effeminate assistant resents his female supervisor (2002, 10). Professional men such as Glebov in *Dom na naberezhnoi* are not discussed through gender—they are the norm and thus need neither explanation nor justification. Women, however, exist at the margins of professionalism and invite comment, if not criticism.

The works of Baranskaia and Grekova depict love, abortion, rape, and motherhood as issues that shape (and deform) women's lives to varying degrees. While some themes (love, motherhood) are extensively discussed, others are all but ignored (rape). Images of the career woman cast doubt as to whether, despite their best intentions, women are capable of bearing the double burden decried by Gradskaia and others.

### **2.3. *Byt* as Prism: Documenting Gendered Values and Engendering Representation**

Baranskaia and Grekova appropriate an overall literary tendency towards documentation and its purported objective stance towards reality as they portray a gulf between the male and female ethics shaping characters' lives. Such an action ultimately argues that these authors believe that basic gender differences must be preserved even as excesses are documented and critiqued.

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effectively used prose to convey women's experiences. Voznesenskaia broke away from Mamonova's group *Zhenshchina i Rossiia* (Women and Russia) in 1980, helping to found the more religious *Mariia* women's group in Leningrad (Kolchevska 2001b, 177-78).



The move away from Stalinism's limitless optimism towards the reduced scale of the Thaw and Stagnation was crucial to rediscovering the complexity of everyday life. This realm in turn revealed itself to be a conglomerate of small yet bedeviling crises, a mundane cosmos of "little things" (Heldt 1992, 169). These minutiae tend toward "muddle," not organization, and coalesce around individual experience instead of the collective order Vladimir Papernyi ascribes to Stalinist culture (Morson 1988, 2; Papernyi 20).

Literary depictions of *byt* sometimes conveyed implicit (and occasionally direct) political commentary through the presumed innocuousness of banality (e. g., "Letom v gorode").<sup>41</sup> A focus on *byt* and understated social commentary permitted women's writing to sometimes advance suspect motifs, such as the internment of repatriated Soviet POWs in *Khoziaika gostinitsy*.

Instead of politicizing their attacks, critics focused on issues of genre and representation, both of which were implicated in gender (Rozanov 295; Lobanov 295). Nina Dikushina argues that the era demanded documentary prose, a broad term connoting either non-fiction or historically-oriented fiction, validated by its purportedly objective relationship to reality (Dikushina 149; Iavchunovskii 4). Citing the memoirist Lidiia Ginzburg, Dikushina makes the suspect assertion that there is no contradiction between objectivity and literary representation. Indeed, "the reader's interest in documentary literature is explained by society's overall attraction to objectivity, authenticity, truthful information, unburdened by fictionalization or

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<sup>41</sup> Vladimir Solov'ev even cautiously approves of the work, noting that it does not foist artificial closure on the characters' lives, i.e., Grekova moves away from socialist realism's pat endings (210).

belletristic devices” (Dikushina 154).<sup>42</sup> This trend influenced women’s writing at the level of theme (an emphasis on *byt* and “real-life” problems) and style: accumulation of details (records of the academic meetings in *Kafedra*) and a lack of overt commentary from the narrator (Ol’ga as unmediated first-person storyteller in *Nedelia kak nedelia*).

Post-Stalinist literature, as Boris Groys argues, moved out of the utopian dreamscape of socialist realism and into a more problematic reality—however, this does not mean that the works of authors such as Trifonov, Baranskaia, and Grekova are “objective” in Dikushina’s sense (Groys 10). While documentation posits rejection of discredited Stalinist *lakirovka* (varnishing), its more “authentic” prose also proved successful at hiding ideological agendas (e.g., the restrictive views of gender that promote marriage as redemption in “Fotografiia Zoiki na fone dvora” or the mother as saint in *Tsvet temnogo medu*).

Documentation typically relies on a realistic, almost journalistic style, with an often fictitious plot (e.g., the realistic yet invented week in *Nedelia kak nedelia*). Documentary genres in the strictest sense either claim to be non-fiction (Baranskaia’s politicized family chronicle,

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<sup>42</sup> Within this context camp prose emerged as a quasi-sanctioned genre for men and, to a lesser extent, women. While less famous than Solzhenitsyn, Evgeniia Ginzburg published two short fictionalized works on the camps in 1965 and 1967 (Barker 1994, 206). Most writing about the gulag lays bare the function of documentary prose: representation becomes moral witness, recovering a partisan vision of a past that might otherwise be forgotten. Such equated terms echo Armstrong’s axiom that fiction is both a document and agent of cultural history—discussion of the camps became a key force in late-1980s reassessments of Soviet society as well as a formative literary trend (1987, 23).

*Stranstvie bezdomnykh*, Wanderings of the Homeless, 1999) or fictionalize what was previously recognized as fact (Baranskaia's narrative about Goncharova).<sup>43</sup>

Baranskaia and Grekova appropriated the type of verisimilitude that Roland Barthes labeled "zero degree of writing": a purportedly "neutral mode" of realistic representation that I argue intersects with the documentary trend (Barthes 5). This seemingly commonsensical pairing, in good Gramscian fashion, masks several underlying assumptions that indicate how Russian women's prose viewed its place in the world.<sup>44</sup> Representation reveals itself to be more than merely art's vision of reality. Indeed, as Rita Felski indicates, it provides the opportunity to describe women's experiences in an easily understandable manner that also persuades readers to adopt the author's more subtly conveyed opinions.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Such perceptions of documentation influenced reception of Baranskaia's work: critics praised the intersection of document and fiction in the image of Goncharova (Murav'eva 164; Nepomniashchii 10). Use of a marginal genre mollified those who otherwise might have objected to a fairly radical reworking of Goncharova's image.

<sup>44</sup> Antonio Gramsci contends that an individual gains "common sense" by unwittingly combining everyday activities with unchallenged conservative truths: "[T]he traditional popular conception of the world—what is unimaginatively called 'instinct,' although it too is in fact a primitive and elementary historical acquisition" (199). In this sense literary criticism is a peculiarly arcane combination of historically conditioned arguments creating a structure within which a critic views a given work (e.g., how critics respond to the limitations implied in depicting *byt*).

<sup>45</sup> Felski reacts against the threat of post-Lacanian *écriture féminine* and its esotericism, an approach allegedly hindering literature's mission to "influence individual and cultural self-understanding in the sphere of everyday life" and social change. This goal opposes the "self-

The style that Felski lauds dominates works such as Baranskaia's little-known "Provody" (The Farewell Party, 1968), which for E. Kashkarova shows how society discards an older woman no longer useful as labor (3). Kashkarova claims "Provody" is a subversive forerunner of *glasnost'* feminism, implying that readers must first identify the problem (an exploitative state) before generating a conclusion (the need to oppose combined gender and political oppression) (1). While such a close connection between response to the narrative and social reform overstates the case, it does validate Felski's basic argument: a quasi-journalistic style helps make small-scale gendered discrimination more visible while the uncomplicated mode of description convinces Thaw and Stagnation readers of the narrative's veracity (Felski 7).

What Felski ignores is how selection of content shapes reader reactions. In "Provody" Baranskaia focuses on the dramatic end of Anna Vasil'evna's career, a part of her life that characterizes her as a victim of the state. The reader does not, however, receive any substantial description of the work that, taking the place of religion, provided her life with meaning (Baranskaia 1981, 114-15). The implications of this missing portrayal should remind critics of the inherently subjective nature of choosing which scenes from "real life" to include in the narrative.

Women authors, Felski notes, appropriate existing representational styles and genres, forging "distinctive woman-centered narratives" for those whose own traditions have been

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referential and metalinguistic system" of the French school, a tradition she sees as divorced from effective attempts to understand women's everyday oppression (7). For Baranskaia and Grekova verisimilitude opposes a different non-referential system: the utopia depicted by socialist realism. Both targets, however, interfere with literature that purports to create a realistic and identifiable image of the world beyond the narrative.

overlooked (84). It is thus no surprise that women authors chose to operate within the staid style of the *literatura byta* (*byt prose*) popularized by Trifonov (Zekulin 36). This framework provided a ready-made arena for “objectively” depicting women’s experiences in an everyday newly reclaimed from the margins.

Any mode of realistic representation in the USSR after 1953 was peculiarly over-determined due to its association with the socialist-realist esthetic dominating Soviet culture from the mid-1930s-mid 1950s.<sup>46</sup> While this style often had little in common with critical realism, its supposed nineteenth-century predecessor, authors such as Boris Polevoi had seen themselves as grounded in representation fundamentally different from the ornamental intricacies of modernism, i.e., where style was as crucial as content (if not more so).<sup>47</sup> Socialist realism’s will to esthetic power, which could not let expression overshadow theme, combined representation with a didacticism uniting all plot elements (Clark 4-5).

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<sup>46</sup> In 1934 Andrei Zhdanov outlined the canonical definition of “socialist realism” at the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers: a depiction of “reality in its revolutionary development,” where “the truthfulness and historical concreteness of the artistic portrayal should be combined with the ideological remolding and education of the toiling people in the spirit of socialism” (21). In this context representation plays the role of classical Russian tradition, which the radiant path of Soviet society and letters will transform as literature itself becomes a way to both depict and alter the world.

<sup>47</sup> Groys contradicts the standard idea that socialist realism reversed the march of modernism. Socialist realism, he argues, fulfilled the plans of the avant-garde to remake life and seize power. However, this transformation occurred alongside the complete suppression of the avant-garde itself (Groys 9).

The prose of Baranskaia and Grekova is likewise often programmatic and firmly subordinates form to content. Nothing must interfere with conveying the hectic nature of Ol'ga's routine in *Nedelia kak nedelia*. Progressing from the hated Monday to Sunday's reprieve, the narrative uses even the idyllic honeymoon flashback to underscore the quotidian's crushing tedium (Baranskaia 1981, 29).<sup>48</sup> *Byt* structures the diegesis just as it constricts the lives of the Voronkovs. Form also reiterates content in Baranskaia's *Den' pominoveniia*, albeit through a different type of plot guided by moral imperatives connected with the essentialist trinity of peace, remembrance, and motherhood.

The programmatic impulse also influences depictions of gender differences. Women authors' negative characters model the individual symptoms and consequences of undesirable male behavior without suggesting that men per se are a collective enemy. In *Fazan* (Pheasant, 1984) Grekova's sole dubious protagonist, the spendthrift Fedor Filatovich, lies dying in bed. Tortured by a dripping faucet that symbolizes a wasted life, he remembers past infidelities and mistakes with women. Such painful ethical stocktaking is one facet of Stagnation-era introspection and resembles the gloomy recollections of Tolstoy's Ivan Il'ich (Shneidman 1979, 31; Iukina 49; Khmel'nitskaia 165). What is different is the emphasis on Fedor Filatovich as erring male as he reviews his past.

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<sup>48</sup> Thomas Lahusen, one of the few critics to address Baranskaia on a sophisticated level, argues that the Crimean flashback is an example of "epic time" (1993, 212). This portion of the narrative is less Bakhtinian than Lukácsian epic temporality, indicating a period of prelapsarian interconnectedness that is diametrically opposed to the fragmented time and numerous tasks now accumulating around Ol'ga (Lukács 1993, 29-30).

Assessing characters' actions involves the present moment as well as recollection. *Nedelia kak nedelia* provides a rogue's gallery of marginal and unpleasant men: Shura's husband drinks, Dark Liusa's husband wants her to stay home, and Light Liusa's husband has another wife (1981, 10). Each embodies a problematic part of male behavior, suggesting a presumed authorial moral superiority that licenses the writer to correctly discern between positive and negative characters as she selects those to portray. The responsible behavior of Ol'ga and the other mothers in the story shows that ethics are clearly gendered: a fictional parallel to Baranskaia's characterization of Russian men as weak.

Women possess an ethical system different from that of men. Abandoned by her husband, Magda in Grekova's *Porogi* (The Rapids, 1981) is more stable and self-reliant than the occasionally cruel and ironically named Neshatov (1986, 55). Many of Grekova's women (almost always mothers) suggest the Tolstoyan ethics Morson and Emerson connect with Bakhtinian prosaics: "[Characters] discover that they can make correct moral decisions without a general philosophy. Instead of a system, they come to rely on a moral wisdom derived from living rightly from moment to moment" (25). Interestingly enough, two male characters—*Kafedra*'s caring Professor Fliagin and the stunted Garusov—exhibit the same self-sacrifice through assuming maternal roles.

If Grekova's women act on the subtler ethics of Tolstoy's earlier period, Baranskaia's rigid characterizations follow the moral absolutism of the novelist's last decades. Motherhood, whether in its sacred (*Den' pominoveniia*) or mundane (*Nedelia kak nedelia*) variant, dictates maternal characters' actions and thoughts. Maternity is the sum total of women's positive ethical system. As Ol'ga Ivanovna observes in *Vdovii parokhod*, however, motherhood can lead to an irrational cult of suffering.

The unity of actions and words that Baranskaia's and Grekova's mothers display constitutes a form of the sincerity prized by the post-Stalinist intelligentsia (Prokhorov 1). Female sincerity, predictably, counters male insincerity. Fedor Filatovich in *Fazan* is the clearest example: a chronic imposter, he tricks German POWs and during NEP (an era itself condemned for its amorality) sleeps with both a neighbor and her teenage daughter (Grekova 1990, 77-78, 89). The predatory and insincere male infects his (often unintended) offspring, as shown by Maika in *Kafedra*. Maika is Grekova's only psychologically complex female villain: seduced by her high school music teacher, Maika never knew her father (1978, 50). As Maika shamelessly exploits Enen, the reader is led to the inescapable conclusion that amorality breeds more of the same. Maika as object lesson indicates that even Grekova's less strident prose has its ethical agenda.

Baranskaia and Grekova, however, show that few characters are either unequivocally punished or essentially evil. While their actions may be despicable (e.g., the hippie freeloader Valiun in Grekova's *Perelom*), their irresponsibility is presented as an inevitable feature of *byt* and the structure of human interaction. Truly atrocious actions are ascribed to an a priori identified enemy (German rapist soldiers in *Den' pominoventiia*)—this tacit limit on the illustration of evil disappears during perestroika.

These authors' characters sometimes resemble ideas more than people, recalling socialist realism's subordination of psychologically nuanced representation to a dubious script for remaking reality (Groys 51). Baranskaia and Grekova pursue a similar goal through the subtler means of critical realism: using "objective" descriptions to persuade the reader that reality is not as it should be. However, neither author considered a systematic reconfiguration of the gender inequalities they identified: instead, Baranskaia and Grekova emphasized symptoms such as the



need for compassion towards women or the problems of (male) alcoholism (Baranskaia 1971, 13; Grekova 1986, 36).

The emotional relationships and individual interests that are two mainstays of private life presuppose gender as a key component in the standard distinction between “authentic”/sincere private and “inauthentic”/insincere public life (Field 2; Wolffheim 1979, 59). In late Soviet culture, Vishevskii states, home and the quotidian were seen as alternatives to a public sphere hopelessly corrupted by the gray terror of the Brezhnev years. Post-Stalinist culture, including female authors, focused on domestic and private life without substantially challenging gender-bound strictures (Reid 1998, 93).

Writers now turned to the individual for moral solace; this refuge also proved illusory (Vishevskii 5). Baranskaia and Grekova show that differences between men and women are one reason that domesticity is no haven in literary depictions of the era. Harried Mar'ia Vladimirovna discovers this truism in *Damskii master*, with her experience suggesting that men and women experience the luxury of a single-family apartment differently. Constant responsibility (a moral equivalent of the double burden) reinforced the need for escape while making it impossible: for Mar'ia Vladimirovna there is no emotional respite from the quotidian. Her absent husband and her platonic relationship with Vitalii substantiate Svetlana Boym's argument that after 1953 intimacy referred to friends rather than to couples: emotional contact supplants sexualized closeness (Boym 101).

Divergent male and female values and ethics lead to constant conflict in everyday life. Baranskaia and Grekova do not allow their female characters recourse to the traditional escape from *byt*: alcohol. In post-Stalinist literature men's drinking both liberates them (for a short time)

and unites the relationships and personal interests comprising private life as males gather (usually outside the home) and enact an imagined escape from tedious responsibility (Field 2).

Women's alcoholism must remain invisible, but this tacit rule is only partially due to the small percentage of female problem drinkers. More importantly, alcoholism is a dereliction of duty; it violates Baranskaia's maternal dicta and, less obviously, the case-by-case ethics of Grekova's positive heroines. Neither overworked Ol'ga in *Nedelia kak nedelia* nor academic mother Mar'ia Vladimirovna in *Damskii master* can indulge in the transcendental oblivion of the intellectual protagonists in Venedikt Erofeev's *Moskva-Petushki* (From Moscow to the End of the Line, written 1969) or Andrei Bitov's *Pushkinskii dom* (Pushkin House, 1978). Male drinkers in women's prose burden their wives and mothers, as shown by the alcoholic sons in Baranskaia's "Krai sveta" and Grekova's "Skripka Rotshil'da" (Rothschild's Violin, 1980). Unable to access the portal long celebrated and ridiculed by Russian culture, female characters are trapped in the mind-numbing sameness of sobriety. Always responsible (and liable for those who are not), they cannot take advantage of the carnivalesque release that drinking sanctions: women are enslaved by their responsibility for others.<sup>49</sup>

The non-existence of female alcoholism in Baranskaia's and Grekova's narratives has several implications for a literature that purports to closely imitate reality. First, the two authors

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<sup>49</sup> Drinking resembles the Bakhtinian carnival in another aspect. The chronotope of drunkenness is a unique combination of time and space, marked by narrowed temporal perception as past and future collapse into a present moment existing (apparently) without consequences. Alternate crowning and decrowning join with loss of consciousness in the literal and metaphorical sense (Bakhtin 1999, 162). This chronotope, episodic in Petrushevskia's short works, structures Venichka's doomed reflections in *Moskva-Petushki*.

imply that such women either do not exist or are unimportant: they have no place in writing that allegedly portrays reality—this stance ironically resembles the attitudes certain critics held about the description of women’s “petty” issues in literature. Likewise, pre-1985 authors shy away from the physiological details of vomit, uncontrolled defecation, and so forth that are the unpalatable effluvia of Petrushevskaiia’s drinkers and oppose the demand for “morality” and “spiritual life” (*dukhovnost'*) in Stagnation literature (Zorin 199). Verisimilitude has its limits, suggesting that certain taboo actions do not exist in Soviet everyday life and cannot be ascribed to Baranskaia’s and Grekova’s morally sound female characters.<sup>50</sup>

Depicting a central alcoholic character violates the Soviet myth that *bytie* triumphs over the difficult material circumstances of *byt*, a scenario Clark describes as the victory of consciousness over spontaneity (15). The hopelessness of chronic drinking questions the optimistic (Marxist-Leninist) future and *lichnaia zhizn'* as a supportive counterpart to the public sphere (Field 92). These illusions and the specific gendered problem of female alcoholics limited permissible depictions of drinking.

Differentiated treatment of alcoholism, like the previously mentioned concerns over successful career women, indicates how Soviet culture sharply delineated male and female roles. The state feared the destabilizing scenario of gender reversal: the prospect of effeminate men and mannish women. Literature was a crucial arena for airing these anxieties. Sergei Chuprinin

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<sup>50</sup> Peripheral male characters may drink, but their reproachable behavior serves as a foil for more virtuous personages. In *Nedelia kak nedelia* Shura’s hard-drinking husband highlights the positive aspects of Ol’ga’s apathetic but sober Dima (Baranskaia 1981, 10). Selection of character types, which emphasizes morality, reaffirms representation as a mediated process in these works.

argues that early 1980s prose reveals women to be sexually aggressive, an inappropriate trait that could be corrected if women emulated their counterparts from twenty or one hundred years ago (12). Chuprinin identifies woman as the errant sex needing instruction, a pattern that would remain typical of literary and advice literature in the perestroika and post-Soviet periods (Klimenkova 156).

Men also stray from the strictures of gender, but women's prose limits depictions of these errant males to either exaggerations of "acceptable" behavior (Fedor's alcoholism in *Vdovii parokhod*) or simple absence (Baranskaia's Liubka in the eponymous story does not know the identity of her father). Homosexuality, a more serious threat to conservative gender roles, does not exist in published literature before perestroika.<sup>51</sup> This absence evidences the Soviet Victorianism dominating official public discourse from the 1930s-mid-1980s (Golod 6). However, eliding gays and lesbians also shows that post-1953 private life is less a sphere than an edifice. Certain levels of this structure (mainly those open before and during Stalinism, e.g., the female as wife and worker) are accessible in women's writing, while others (homosexuality, female alcoholism, incest) remained sealed for decades. *Lichnaia zhizn'* may have been the right of every Soviet citizen, but this variegated space also had its darkened corners (Kharkhordin

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<sup>51</sup> Unlike male homosexuality, lesbianism was never illegal in the USSR. This incongruity does not reflect more tolerance toward same-sex relations between women: Soviet lawmakers simply did not conceive of such actions and hence provided no legal sanctions against them (Goscilo 1996a, 18). Mark Banting, Catriona Kelly, and James Riordan describe the lament of one gay activist, whose lover was murdered in 1991. "[G]ay life had been easier in the Brezhnev years, when it was not recognized: parents would not see anything wrong in a son sleeping with his best friend, assuming this to be ordinary male friendship" (Banting, Kelly, and Riordan 346).

1997, 355). Perestroika writers (most notably Petrushevskaia) would illuminate these murky recesses of private life.

Late Soviet culture demonstrates that the state's main interest in everyday and private life lay in preserving the nuclear family and reversing ethnic Russians' falling birthrates (Graskova 101; Madison 329). The much-feared "demographic crisis," to which Baranskaia indirectly refers by including the pro-natalist questionnaire in *Nedelia kak nedelia*, reflected both a drop in the number of Russian infants and fears that this ethnic group would lose its status as the majority in the USSR (Lapidus 131).

Pro-natalist efforts were only one part of state policy. Liljeström identifies an increasingly rigid conception of gender roles in the 1970s, with "heterosexist" policies implemented through de facto wage discrimination, legal and administrative channels, and advice related to family and proper behavior (1993, 165). Baranskaia for her part conveys through Ol'ga's struggles with groceries, children, and transportation that caring for the family justifies such everyday trials. Critics did not overlook this cult of the maternal, arguing that the protagonist's role as homemaker rationalizes those very same problems that feminists would later see as symptomatic of oppression (Naumova 83; Kashkarova 2). Within this schema authors of fiction further solidify the ostensibly natural connection between maternal and female roles: the trials of Ol'ga and Grekova's scientist-mothers are cast as inevitable.

Questioning gender roles could also destabilize national iconography. Like countries such as France, Russia negotiates between images of a male state (*otechestvo*, fatherland) and a female land (*rodina*, motherland). This opposition implies a gap between symbolically male rulers and the metaphorically female ruled, a centuries-old divide that Soviet authorities found convenient. The imagined body of the Soviet state—particularly under the tellingly named

Stalin—became more masculine, hard, and presumably unyielding (Hellebust 93-96; Gillespie 5). This system provided little room for the power of the female: while the state is mechanized and rational, the motherland is fertile and steeped in the traditionalism of the backward peasant woman. In this relationship of binaries the first term must subordinate the second according to Marxist-Leninist rhetoric: history progresses from the agrarian/female to the industrialized/male, with the latter eventually producing the proletariat. Any questioning of gender roles disturbs these cultural semiotics underlying Russian history and its Soviet incarnation.

Fear of gender reversal hints at widespread but indirectly expressed anxieties over the urbanization shaping Russian modernity. The capital was a particularly extreme example. Moscow's growth from 1970 to 1990 was in great part due to *limitchitsy* (female temporary workers), who arrived with the traditions of the countryside, and to Moscow's incorporation of outlying villages (Mil'man 1997, 38). Such displacement of the rural women bearing authentic "Russianness" imperiled custom and cultural memory. Increased urbanization was also profoundly unsettling for the urban intelligentsia in the works of Baranskaia and Grekova. These intellectuals found their everyday world invaded by often less educated newcomers (e.g., *Kafedra's* Dar'ia Stepanovna), who would later be described by perestroika-era authors such as Nina Sadur. Hidden anxiety over social transformation and the future of the Russian people caused consternation over gender roles, with women authors depicting and often fueling these fears through descriptions of daily life.

Through purportedly realistic representation Baranskaia and Grekova selectively document women's lives, focusing on how male and female characters display different ethical systems. These systems are inseparable from traditional gender roles, which both critics and

authors attempted to preserve during Thaw and Stagnation despite social changes such as urbanization and changing demographics.

#### 2.4. **Imagining *Byt*: Impasse, Obstruction, or Opportunity?**

The previous sections of this chapter argue that the relationship between Baranskaia's and Grekova's prose, representation, and depicted reality subordinates verisimilitude to morality. Critics and authors debated the role of journalistic style and whether women's experiences could be considered typical from an artistic viewpoint. These issues in turn influenced debate to which degree (if any) *byt* should influence the prose of Baranskaia and Grekova.

Baranskaia advocated representation as a way to make the public aware of selected problems in women's lives—a key strategy of reporters (Baranskaia 1988, 31; Kashkarova 5). However, her disdain for journalism was only surpassed by her strident refusals to be labeled a feminist (Baranskaia 1990, 588; Baranskaia 1988, 34). Naumova, painting a fairly sympathetic picture of Grekova, opines that the deep psychological issues she explores through *byt* redeem her quasi-journalistic style (99). Gosילו pairs 1960s-70s women's writing with journalism, but links this purported stylistic staleness with acceptance of underlying gender inequalities (1996b, 1). The era's pedestrian style, however, had utility: it made women's everyday experiences understandable to readers and more palatable to cautious publishers.

Naumova's and Baranskaia's disclaimers imply that the “naked” verisimilitude of journalistic style (Barthes's “zero degree of writing”) is insufficient: a parade of facts does not constitute literature and, as Iurii Tynianov argues, even opposes “true” art (Tynianov 19). Tokareva and Grekova recast the argument in slightly more abstract terms when naming the

authors who influenced them: the humane realist Chekhov (Tokareva) and mystical realist Dostoyevsky (Grekova) (Tokareva 2003 interview; Grekova 1983, 6). Both predecessors transformed writing about everyday life into far-reaching discussions of the human condition. Hailing from such august (male) company legitimates Tokareva and Grekova and permits them to distance themselves from other women writers. I have already mentioned Baranskaia's moral affinity with Tolstoy—a commonality noted by Nina Denisova, albeit with the weighty caveat that ethics and artistic representation are incompatible in literature (67).

Ways of portraying the everyday became almost as controversial as the content involved (lines, communal apartments, and so forth). The unresolved problem of typicality is a key issue, which post-Stalinist authors inherited through the legacies of critical and socialist realism. Two approaches to typicality dominated 1960s-mid-1980s literary criticism: what I term “transformative” and “reflective.” The first of these comes from Lukács's assertion that the typical is what will be/should be in a given era (i.e., representation of reality can transform reality) (1964, 122). Within this schema the reality beyond the narrative is a temporary obstacle, as Vladimir Rozanov assumes in attacking Grekova's depictions of anomalous shortcomings (dead dogs and toilets) besmirching the Red Army in *Na ispytaniakh* (295).

Women writers' rhetoric of documentation, however, posits typicality as reflective: describing what exists and hence must be conveyed to the public.<sup>52</sup> This viewpoint justifies

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<sup>52</sup> “Reflective” in this context approximates “reflectionism,” the Marxist view of literature as programmatically representing a certain class or situation. This equation operates in Baranskaia's morally charged representation and Petrushevskia's ensuing critique of the intelligentsia.

Grekova and Tokareva, however, use depictions to display everyday behavior as more neutral—



depicting both the familiar (the overcrowded buses in *Nedelia kak nedelia*) and the exceptional (in *Perelom* Kira Petrovna's move from respected doctor to powerless patient): both constitute the human condition and thus ultimately typify our place in reality. Women readers identified with the first of these approaches and saw *Nedelia kak nedelia* as describing their own everyday existence (Azhgikhina 2003 interview; Baranskaia 1988, 31).

Baranskaia and Grekova imply that women's experiences are both statistically and morally typical in a reflective sense. In terms of numbers, they are the quotidian of the majority of the USSR's population. They also resemble Lukács's ethics-oriented discussion of Ivan Denisovich's "extreme" situation: readers are morally bound to consider the experiences of the inmate simply because they exist, with this peripheral context implicating more ordinary realities (1971, 8, 13). What the two female authors are less willing to admit is that this reflective image of reality occurs alongside the representation of gendered moral behavior (e.g., women's self-sacrifice as inevitable and "correct").

One can understand the reluctance of critics such as Rozanov to support the reflective function of typicality. This endorsement would create an ultimately disastrous chain of causality. If typicality is part of existing reality (reflective) and not its transformation, then women (the majority of the population) constitute this reflected reality. This majority, mired in the quotidian and privileging *telesnost'* over the ideational, had long been deemed the most backward segment of Soviet society. Stressing the ideologically marginal viewpoint of women indicates that the USSR is indeed one "big communal apartment": a constant state of petty crisis antithetical to reaching the Marxist-Leninist radiant future.

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while irony colors Tokareva's depictions of *byt*, it does not offer the totalizing worldview contained in Baranskaia's cult of female responsibility.

Critical responses to depiction of everyday life in the works of Baranskaia and Grekova fall into two categories. The first group, implying that literature as a whole should be transformative, evokes Roman Jakobson's description of *byt* as a swamp-like realm, swallowing and suffocating any aspirations to higher meaning (277). I. Vladimirova accuses Baranskaia of perpetuating *byt* through its description. While the characters in "Partnery" (Partners) are ballerinas, they are nonetheless described through purportedly petty speculations about infidelities and a woman's worries of how a child will affect her career on the stage (Vladimirova 1981, 181). A cafeteria and other accoutrements of banality clutter the work, with no ideational significance attached to them—Baranskaia first protests the material "stereotypes" of everyday life and then perpetuates them (Vladimirova 1981, 182). Following Jakobson and Tynianov, Vladimirova sees the world of objects as dead weight encumbering the narrative: literature, she implies, should transform what it depicts instead of merely reflecting it.

Viacheslav Savateev echoes this view in an extremely formulaic reading of Grekova. While conceding that life was difficult during the war years, he criticizes *Vdovii parokhod* for portraying such a bleak reality: "In art it is not only important how it was, but also how it should be" (Savateev 175). He then qualifies this apodictic phrase by asserting that he refers not to a "violent normative process in literature," but a search for creative potential (Savateev 175). Despite spurning Stalinist varnishing, he affirms the socialist-realist maxim of writing supported by transformative typicality, for which *byt* is anathema.

Some critics see *byt* as tolerable if it does not dominate a work. N. Klado notes that Maia Ganina's "Uslysh' svoi chas" (Know When It's Your Hour, 1975), for instance, should assert that daily life is a part but not the limit of experiences (4). The critic is likewise disturbed by the unmotivated and aimless narrator, an unease recalling Savateev's claim that *byt* confounds

attempts to display the clear intentions and logical plans of the better world awaiting Soviets (Klado 4). Worse yet, he argues, the everyday obfuscates motivation and frustrates attempts to explain the present. Here Klado invokes another survival of socialist realism: a work's intent (inseparable from its author) should be clear to the reader.

Denial of finalized meaning is also problematic, as V. Lysenko shows when noting that Tokareva's ethical relativism is the *modus vivendi* of the philistine. Tokareva's lack of values, the glut of everyday life in her fiction, and the writer's status as a practitioner of *byt* unite to produce amoral literature (Lysenko 103). In the intriguingly entitled "Lzheromantika obshchikh mest" (False Romanticism of the Commonplace), Vladimir Stepanov makes a crucial accusation that will be the leitmotif of post-Soviet criticism on Tokareva: "This 'romanticism' turns into a crassly philistine condition, coexisting quite well with a false sense of being the elect, not resembling other people, etc." (307).

A second group of critics diverges from the above opinions, arguing that *byt*'s presence is either useful per se or acts as a stepping-stone to loftier goals. From this viewpoint women's quotidian can be described through reflective typicality: there is no need to mask everyday experiences through transformation. Ia. El'sberg hesitantly admits the necessity of *byt* and sets the tone for later discussion of Baranskaia with his analysis of "Provody." Conceding that Soviet literature should describe the quotidian, he adds that one must not overlook the everyday's "spiritual and ideational content" [*dukhovnoi, ideinoi sodержatel'nosti*] (4).<sup>53</sup> O. Novikova and V. Novikov make a similar comment when applauding Tokareva for making *byt* "ideational,"

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<sup>53</sup> Kashkarova alleges that this remark by El'sberg, who had been involved in the repression of the poet Osip Mandel'shtam and other 1930s literary figures, shows that the state was especially worried by the story (3).

just as the writer herself asserts that her works use *byt* and *realia* to create *bytie* (Novikova and Novikov 56; Tokareva 2003 interview). Descriptions of the quotidian should connect it with higher meaning, preferably with an ideologically appropriate slant.

This second group of critics emulates the narrator in Grekova's "Za prokhodnoi" and sees *byt* as either intrinsically valuable or at least as a journey to more significant topics (Grekova 1990, 403). Such a stance parallels Maurice Blanchot's description of the quotidian as lacking truth but being a part of Truth: the everyday contains a significance that is not immediately visible (12).

Trifonov was *byt*'s best-known defender during the 1960s-80s. Not surprisingly, he sees the everyday as inseparable from great art.

Взаимоотношения [факта и художественности] есть взаимоотношения жизни и искусства, а по этому поводу лучше древних никто не сказал: одно кратко, другое бесконечное. И стало быть, задача художника: в кратком находить бесконечное (Трифонов 1974, 194)

The interaction of [fact and artistry] is the interaction of life and art. In this sense no one has said it better than the ancient Greeks: one is ephemeral, the other is immortal. And the task of the artist is thus to find the immortal in the ephemeral.

The true artist, Trifonov avers, fuses the *byt* and *bytie* long estranged from each other in Russian culture. *Byt* is not a conduit, but itself a resource for the patient and talented writer capable of finding meaning in what to others appears trivial. Within this context Andrei Ar'ev defends the decentered nature of *byt*'s meaning and credits Grekova's prose with showing the futility of laying claim to the truth (14). The critic lauds how *Damskii master* uses everyday moments to evade the pat solutions Savateev and Klado proffer.

These disparate ideas about representing *byt* share the assumption that the everyday is above all a female experience. L. Zhukhovitskii approvingly notes how Tokareva uses a woman's sense of details and male skill in depicting unusual situations that reveal the extraordinary (246). Here Trifonov's ephemeral/quotidian is joined with the female, which is molded into art through stern masculine resolve. A stronger and more rational force must subdue the feminized expanse of the everyday in order to distill its meaning.

Such conceptions continue in disguised form earlier speculations about the feminine nature of *byt*. The posited egalitarianism of Soviet rhetoric carefully limited divisive discussions of differences between men and women. *Byt*, however, served as a codeword for "natural" distinctions between male and female experience. Literary critics after 1953 bound the quotidian to banality (versus transcendence), reduced scope (versus the limitless vision of Stalin), ateleological time (versus the posited progress of Marxist-Leninist ideology), private life (versus public collectivism), and anomaly (versus transformative typicality). Such comparisons deformed assessments of women's lives and literature.

Female authors, however, benefited from *byt* as gendered reference in several ways. The quotidian facilitated discussion of taboo subjects (abortion, alcoholism, and so forth). Women's writing in the 1960s-mid-1980s relied on documentation, an appeal to realism, and claims of typicality to appropriate the quotidian as a representational arena. Perestroika-era female authors would build on this precedent, using the everyday to move from selective examination of women's issues to a systematic indictment of the social conditions responsible for them.

### 3. Perestroika and the Reemergence of Women's Prose

From the early 1960s to roughly 1985 *byt* played a key role in female authors' attempts to document limited gendered problems within mainstream Soviet literature. Natal'ia Baranskaia and I. Grekova established women's everyday lives as a legitimate if sometimes controversial theme, using the chronotope of crisis to focus attention on gender-specific spaces (hospital, communal apartment, line) and the repetitive nature of women's time. Opponents and supporters debated whether it was necessary and artistically permissible to depict the quotidian. Critics linked this writing's preoccupations with *byt* to pre-existing state and cultural conceptions of the close relationship between women and the everyday.

Perestroika (1985-91) was a period of cataclysmic change for Soviet culture.<sup>54</sup> Women authors, having long dealt with the idea of personal and everyday crisis, now existed within a context of national upheavals: political events, once the province of male authors such as Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and Andrei Siniavskii, were mirrored in the small-scale works of Liudmila Petrushevskaia, Nina Gorlanova, and others. Six anthologies published between 1989 and 1991 made women's prose a visible and much-debated feature of Soviet literature. Women authors responded to post-1985 cultural shifts while following the stylistic and thematic

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<sup>54</sup> Historians usually date perestroika, the late-Soviet period of rapid restructuring, as beginning with Mikhail Gorbachev's election to General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in March 1985 (Riasanovsky 589-91; Gorbanevskii and Mochalov 4). While perestroika (restructuring) specifically refers to social and economic change and *glasnost'* (openness) denotes the state's policy vis-à-vis culture, the two have essentially become synonyms.

precedents of their counterparts under Nikita Khrushchev and Leonid Brezhnev: heavy doses of *byt*, focus on female protagonists, and a strong but less restricting reliance on verisimilitude. Baranskaia and Grekova adapted poorly to the new conditions and were all but forgotten by 1991—these authors' conservative style and virtuous heroines no longer captivated readers overwhelmed by political and cultural crises.

Perestroika women's prose shares the core concerns of the period's literature and journalism: bringing previously private, taboo, or politically suspect topics into the public arena for discussion (Goscilo 1990, xxxi; Stites 1992, 178-81). Making the private public builds on female authors' legitimation of the private/everyday during the previous two decades, which had described hectic workdays (Baranskaia's *Nedelia kak nedelia*) and scientists balancing research and family (Grekova's *Kafedra, Pod fonarem*). However, the era's female authors (e.g., Gorlanova, Svetlana Vasilenko) also critiqued gender differences through a systematic approach especially attentive to how the state neglected or victimized women.<sup>55</sup> Making the private public involved expanding and diversifying the chronotope of crisis. As with discussions of gender, this spatial-temporal strategy became broader, at times operating on a collective as well as individual level.

The appearance of women's anthologies created an easily identifiable cultural space within which authors and critics discussed women's prose. Critics' reactions to female writers raised the related issues of typicality and neutrality, anxieties inherited from socialist realism and

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<sup>55</sup> A systematic approach in literature entails assembling specific facts and opinions (e.g., deplorable conditions in maternity homes) that lead to larger and more critical conclusions (women's well-being is not a state priority). The perestroika authors my study examines often move from particular instances to criticism of the society producing these shortcomings.

appropriated by post-Stalinist women's writing. In crucial distinction to previous decades, critics such as Pavel Basinskii used gender *per se* as a denigrating artistic and ideological criterion. This explicit descriptor built on the reception of Baranskaia and Grekova, in which analyses of *byt* had served as coded references to women's experiences and creative abilities.

This chapter examines how women authors connected perestroika's systematic critique and exposure of the taboo to discussion of gender inequality. While some writers (Gorlanova, Petrushevskaiia) addressed this problem through broadening the chronotope of crisis and subordinating action to discourse, others (Vasilenko, Marina Karpova) directly attacked a state that viewed women as secondary. Critics for their part now responded to women's writing as a distinct literary trend uniting a diverse group of authors with common themes and narrative strategies.

### **3.1. Exposing Everyday Life: Theatrics, Gender Roles, State**

Perestroika women authors, like their male counterparts, exploited the era's new openness. Scrutinizing previously taboo areas of private life, female writers examined how traditional gender roles both defined and deformed women. Two new targets emerged during the late 1980s: the intelligentsia and the state.

The first cultural event to greatly influence women's prose was the beginning of Gorbachev's infamous sobriety campaign in May 1985. The policy both suspended the state's tacit support for the heavy drinking of the Stagnation years and implied that this private yet visible activity was now (once again) grounds for public intervention.<sup>56</sup> The Gorbachev

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<sup>56</sup> The USSR and Russia have experienced numerous such shifts in state policy. Irina Takala notes that the Khrushchev regime for its part attempted to boost alcohol sales (which generate



campaign (1985-87) was more disruptive than previous efforts. Production of hard liquor fell from 1.6 billion liters (1985) to 804 million in 1987 before increasing to 1.38 billion by 1990 (Takala 265). This decrease meaningfully affected neither mortality rates nor attitudes: while from 1985-87 the official death toll due to alcohol decreased by more than two times, drug-addiction cases rose by 2.3 times and poisoning incidents increased 5.5 times (Takala 267). Toxic substances substituted for deficit alcohol probably account for this second group of statistics.

The 1985 campaign was more serious (and hated) than its Brezhnev-inspired predecessor and women writers became less circumspect in their descriptions of drinking (e.g., Petrushevskaia's incontinent alcoholic in "Ali-Baba"). An often brutal frankness unites these authors with other perestroika-era writers and film directors, especially those who portrayed *chernukha* (sexually explicit or violent material), which rejected Russian literature's long tradition of idealism and triumph over materiality (Graham 14).<sup>57</sup>

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state revenues) with catchy slogans such as: *Vkusno, deshevo, pitatel'no—peite vodku obiazatel'no* (Tasty, Cheap, and Nourishing: Be Sure to Drink Vodka) (251). A sobriety campaign in the early 1980s was a boon for women writers: it raised the domestic problems resulting from (male) alcoholism to the level of national issue, thus making the works of Baranskaia and Grekova topical (Zekulin 34-35).

<sup>57</sup> See Seth Graham's discussion of *chernukha* in films such as *Malen'kaia Vera* and Pavel Lungin's *Taksi-bliuz* (Taxi Blues, Lenfil'm, 1988) (10-11). Mark Lipovetskii, discussing *chernukha* in printed form, argues that Viktor Astaf'ev's *Pechal'nyi detektiv* (Sad Detective Story, 1986) exemplifies this tendency because it focuses on alcoholism and hopelessness (2002,

Both newspapers and “thick” journals published increasingly scathing exposés of past and current problems: unlike during the Thaw, public criticism of the state began with attacks on Stalinism but went on to challenge Lenin and the allegedly democratic October 1917 revolution (Shneidman 1995, 3-5). The Chernobyl' disaster (1986), ethnic tensions, and ongoing anti-Soviet protests in Eastern Europe added to an atmosphere of imminent catastrophe.

By reevaluating the Soviet past and present perestroika fundamentally changed the content and style of public discourse. The legacy of the socialist-realist esthetic had asserted a worldview in which literature had to focus on life's hopeful “essence” instead of problematic “phenomena” (Groys 51). Discussion of *byt* during the 1960s-80s subordinated the everyday to this redeeming core and, as Chapter Two notes, critics thus expected literature to connect the occasionally disappointing present to a radiant future. The late 1980s destroyed this scenario. Public discussion of the quotidian changed its image to that of a harbinger of destruction as crisis after crisis shook the Soviet empire. The era witnessed the ascendancy of an esthetic of negation, which Vitalii Korotich termed “eradicating falsehood”—according to mass media and literature, reality was not improving but in fact worsening (Korotich vii; Vasil'eva 1989b, 33). Mikhail Zolotonosov summarizes the *Zeitgeist* by borrowing Anthony Burgess's term “cacotopia” to describe the negative trend in *glasnost'* literature and culture (1990, 192). The Soviet positive worldview proved no longer viable and was ousted by the type of antithesis Thomas Kuhn outlines: a negative model where the telos was now elemental chaos and poverty instead of the consciousness and prosperity of communism (Kuhn 77; Clark 15). Women's prose was shaped by this trend.

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61). Both critics' analyses imply that *chernukha* questions the triumph of mind over matter and, by extension, literature's possibility to enrich the soul.

Petrushevskaja, along with Tat'iana Tolstaia, is one of the authors most often identified with women's writing during perestroika (I. Murav'eva 99).<sup>58</sup> This high profile is in great part due to her shocking themes and exposition, which give a bleak vision of private life that parallels the media's discrediting of state-promulgated artificial optimism. For Andrei Zorin, the author's story *Svoi krug* (Our Crowd, written 1979, published 1988) is a chamber of horrors masked by realism, an image evoking an exhibitionist array of terrors (200). Petrushevskaja's themes make the rogue's gallery of irresponsible men in *Nedelia kak nedelia* seem tame. Helena Goscilo observes that the physically and morally repulsive become banal and unremarkable in the author's work.

Suicide, alcoholism, prostitution, one-night stands, fictitious marriages, unwanted pregnancies, abortions, neglected children, crushing poverty, theft, physical and psychological violence constitute the "norm" of Petrushevskaya's fiction. (1992, 12)

Petrushevskaja's prose exemplifies the negation of idealism and obsession to expose that mark *chernukha* and perestroika.<sup>59</sup> To this end the desperate fates of her characters are manifested as

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<sup>58</sup> This chapter examines Petrushevskaja's fictional prose issued before 2004 (excluding fairy tales). As with the otherwise divergent Baranskaia and Grekova in Chapter Two,

Petrushevskaja's oeuvre has a fairly static style and content. This is true whether the publication date is 1985 or 2003—in many cases five or ten years separate writing from publication.

<sup>59</sup> The author's focus on the body emphasizes material *byt* over ideational *bytie*, with the preponderance of female characters underscoring the trinity of female-quotidian-physical.

Petrushevskaja mixes actions associated with the upper and lower bodily strata, combinations that Goscilo distinguishes from Mikhail Bakhtin's conception of carnival owing to two key

starkly as possible. Transgression, whether initiated by self or others, has highly visible consequences: the public must clearly connect misstep and tragedy. Pregnancy, a noticeable result of usually illicit sexual activity, is a favored device that perpetuates the cycle of single mothers and unwanted children in the author's works.<sup>60</sup> There is a clear causal relationship between male irresponsibility (drunken, absent, or incestuous fathers) and women's suffering. This link develops a trend less graphically depicted in the philandering Volodia in Grekova's "Letom v gorode" or the seduction of teenage Alka in Maiia Ganina's *Sozvezdie bliznetsov* (The Gemini Constellation, 1974).<sup>61</sup>

A penchant for publicly displaying the consequences of transgression connects the author to a long tradition in Russian literature. Despite recognizing that both Petrushevskaiia and Fyodor

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missing elements: "an authentically celebratory dimension" and "a sense of community, of group relations cemented by shared values, if only for the duration of carnival" (Goscilo 1993, 141).

The triumph of corporeality reflects humanity's enslavement to its animal instincts.

<sup>60</sup> In *Vremia noch'* naïve Alena loses her virginity to classmate Sasha, a chance encounter that leaves her pregnant and echoes her mother's fate (Petrushevskaiia 1998, 362-63, 386-87).

"Detskii prazdnik" (A Children's Vacation) describes how a sixteen-year old on vacation is raped and impregnated, while teenage Tan'ka in "Otets i mat'" (Father and Mother) has a miscarriage after allegedly having sex with her father (Petrushevskaiia 2000, 129, 131, 256).

<sup>61</sup> Alka's experience indicates that there is no eluding the nefarious values of the same political system that produced her politically privileged corrupters (Gasiorowska 1981, 61). This implication undermines the intelligentsia axiom that *lichnaia zhizn'* opposes the cynical opportunism of late Soviet official life—Petrushevskaiia conclusively shatters this assumption as well as the sacrosanct image of the intelligentsia itself.

Dostoyevsky describe “the human animal, the simultaneous victim/victor, and the murdering mother,” Sally Dalton-Brown does not mention another commonality: the Dostoevskian proclivity for public suicide (vii). Like the spurned Svidrigailov, Petrushevskaiia’s characters end their lives in as visible a manner as possible, compounding earlier errors with the Orthodox sin of suicide. The two favored methods are hanging and defenestration: former convict Andrei threatens to throw himself out of the window (again) in *Vremia noch'*, while the teenage outcast Batsilla and the husband in “Gripp” (The Flu) act on this intention (Petrushevskaiia 1998, 368, 180, 214).

Defenestration is public and irreversible, while hanging oneself presents an opportunity to be saved and comforted while engaging in the emotional manipulation Gosciolo ascribes to Petrushevskaiia’s characters (1992, 12).<sup>62</sup> Natal'ia Ivanova remarks that Petrushevskaiia treats Baranskaia’s content in an existential manner: Zoika could have hanged herself had she not been transformed into a demure and chaste wife (23-24). Petrushevskaiia, however, would have seen such a resolution as the artificial and unlikely rebirth that it was. While her characters and narrators indulge in theatrical displays, they are of an entirely realistic sort.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> The heroine’s attempted hanging in “Dama s sobakami” (The Lady with the Dogs) revises the fate of Anton Chekhov’s Anna Sergeevna, while the spendthrift son Vovik in “Chudo” (Miracle) survives only thanks to the questionable beneficence of maternal love (Petrushevskaiia 1998, 201; Petrushevskaiia 2002, 172).

<sup>63</sup> Occasionally altruism motivates such dramatic actions. The anonymous narrator in *Svoi krug* exploits the poetics of public display when beating her son Alesha in front of her friends, correctly calculating that they will take the boy away and thus care for him (however ineptly) after her impending death (Petrushevskaiia 1998, 347-48).

Petrushevskaja's themes, while scandalous in the context of 1980s Soviet culture, are hardly unique in world literature.<sup>64</sup> Her novelty lies instead in a narrative style that, recalling Dostoyevsky's works, is fueled by rumors, gossip, and polemics as cornerstones of oral communication (Hielscher 1995, 349-50). Through communication with her (unwilling) interlocutors Anna Andrianovna in *Vremia noch'* assumes the mantle of public morality in addition to her role as maternal savior. The narrator is a conduit for the communal voice and its prejudices, rendering the stories even more startling owing to the often matter-of-fact comments on their horrific content (Goscilo 1992, 13). Petrushevskaja's overly garrulous narrators reveal others' faults as dramatically as possible. These often monological storytellers combine the verbal habits of the nosy *kommunalka* neighbors in Grekova's and Baranskaia's prose and those of perestroika journalists: all blur the boundary between public and private, implying that even the most intimate detail is fair game for discussion.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Toni Morrison is one US author who depicts victims of incest, rape, abject poverty, and maternal rage. Dana Heller makes a tentative if not overly successful connection between Morrison's and Petrushevskaja's conception of dysfunctional families and their unenviable results (162-63).

<sup>65</sup> Often the narrator is not named but rather implied through the accretion of Soviet clichés and commonplaces. Mentioning Aleksandr Pushkin amidst the incest and alcoholism in "Ioko Ono" (Yoko Ono) is both incongruous and suggestive of a cultured narrator purportedly removed from the actions described (Petrushevskaja 1998, 144). Including the ultimate icon of Russian high culture in this cesspool of poverty and filth creates a heretical link between the intelligentsia and the masses as well as between the upper and lower bodily strata (e.g., Pushkin and sexuality).

Petrushevskaiia advances several reasons for adopting garrulous narrators steeped in Soviet language.

Я многое прятала тогда, камуфлировала под бесстрастное, черствое, неблагородное повествование. Я иногда даже говорила голосом коллектива. Голосом толпы и сплетни (я не знала тогда то, что стало мне ясно теперь— все эти рассказы были театром). (Петрушевская 2003, 322)

At that point there was much that I hid, camouflaged under passionless, stale, untalented storytelling. Sometimes I even spoke in the voice of the collective—the voice of the crowd and gossip (I did not know then what has become clear to me now: all those stories were theatre).

Such disingenuous narrative strategies did not increase her small number of pre-1985 prose publications. Voluble storytellers could not disguise Petrushevskaiia's vision of *byt* and the existential emptiness at its core as a hell annihilating any higher purpose in life.

The narrator's appropriation of a collective voice, however, does successfully evoke theatricality: the storyteller is eager to put others' lives on display, inflating her own importance as she breathlessly relates tragedy. Suffering becomes a stage. Petrushevskaiia was first known in the USSR and even accepted into the Writers Union as a playwright; one who works with the most public of literary forms. This theatricality is crucial to all her works, regardless of their putative genre. Within this context traditional distinctions between tragedy (preserving dignity) and comedy (loss of dignity) are unimportant, as few of her characters have any lasting self-respect. Petrushevskaiia argues that infusing humor into tragic moments presumes that both are compatible in the human condition, connecting her to a long Russian tradition of depicting suffering through laughter (Petrushevskaiia 1999, 41; Mil'man 51). For the author *byt* is a stage

from which there is no escape—even death is public and revealing.<sup>66</sup> This aspect of her works again reflects Dostoevskian themes, in particular the suicide of Kirillov in *Besy* (The Demons, 1872) as well as the aforementioned Svidrigailov.

Several stories highlight this dramaturgical tendency. The narrator of “Ioko Ono” remarks that several generations of alcoholic Khazar women could be a “Greek tragedy,” while “Teshcha Edipa” (Oedipus’s Mother-in-Law) by its very name evokes doom, indecent comedy, and the inescapable conflicts between parents and children (Petrushevskaiia 1998, 145; Petrushevskaiia 1995, 18-21).<sup>67</sup> Lipovetskii, writing before the latter story appeared in 1995, astutely observes that the Oedipal myth implicitly informs all of Petrushevskaiia’s writing (1994, 232). As with the plays of Sophocles, they link individual fates to familial and collective tragedy, leading the reader to infer that humanity’s spiritual and intellectual strivings are as pointless as the horrible *byt* of her characters. Following the logic of *chernukha*, Petrushevskaiia uses a grim external reality to imply an even more frightening internal wasteland.

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<sup>66</sup> Using depictions of *byt* as social and even spiritual commentary connects Petrushevskaiia to the themes of the nineteenth-century author and playwright Nikolai Gogol (Pertsovskii 182).

Petrushevskaiia herself notes a childhood obsession with *Portret* (The Portrait, 1835), a Gogol story emphasizing the dangers of representation and the power of the gaze (Petrushevskaiia 2003, 312).

<sup>67</sup> In a slightly different vein “Zhizn' eto teatr” (Life is Theatre) details director Sasha’s problems with lovers and apartments, with the third-person narrator voicing the dramatist’s idea that her life is a play not fit for the stage (Petrushevskaiia 1998, 150). This narratorial comment is a Petrushevskaiian ruse, masking the implied and actual authors’ compulsion to watch and display others’ shortcomings.



Humor and an emphasis on dramatic genres indicate that Petrushevskaja envisions life as a stage that presents negative models. This dramaturgical metaphor is not unique to perestroika, although it fits the era's esthetic of negation: bettering society through identifying and dissecting what it should not allow.<sup>68</sup> Petrushevskaja draws upon Russia's tradition of dramatic social commentary, which helps explain why she terms the novellas *Vremia noch'* and *Svoi krug* comedies (2003, 309). Her "comic" prose, however, sooner resembles a new type of Shakespearean tragedy in which characters physically survive yet are spiritually dead.

Noting that the hero in her works is the audience, Petrushevskaja even uses the Soviet term "positive hero," with its suggestion of imparting a higher consciousness to the reader (Petrushevskaja 1999, 35; Petrushevskaja 1988, 7). This hero unwittingly follows a scripted response: 1. Recognition of others' misery, 2. Empathy for the characters, 3. Recognition of oneself in the characters (McLaughlin 1989b, 98; qtd. in Dalton-Brown 176). Petrushevskaja's reasoning proposes that, in the spirit of socialist realism, readers transform themselves by responding to a negative model. Guiding the reader to an appropriately empathetic response also recalls Jean-Paul Sartre's defense of existentialist literature, which he termed "*a humanist philosophy of action, effort, combat, and solidarity*" (160, italics in original). Existentialism leads the reader not to spiritual emptiness, but to a new and presumably genuine morality.

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<sup>68</sup> In Russian drama Denis Fonvizin's *Nedorosl'* (The Minor, 1782) was an early link between humor and the power of the public gaze, with Gogol's *Revizor* (The Government Inspector, 1836) the apotheosis of this trend. While both playwrights use public ridicule to critique individuals and institutions, Gogol provides neither the positive state intervention nor the didactic conclusion imposed on the Prostakovs. Instead he and Petrushevskaja present a negative model with no alternative.

Petrushevskaiia thus reiterates the strategies of narrator Anna Andrianovna, who uses horror and scandal to goad the reader toward her own allegedly higher plane of morality.

Mariia Remizova partially follows this script when she associates the author with the pessimism of Tolstoy, Chekhov, and Dostoyevsky, whose gloom is illuminated by the telos of guiding the reader to social and spiritual action. Remizova also compares Petrushevskaiia's attitude toward her characters to the humanity Viktor Shklovskii finds in Gogol's description of Akakii Akakievich in *Shinel'* (The Overcoat, 1842) (Remizova 4). This interpretation reflects sympathy for both the "little man" and his Petrushevskaiian equivalent, a key step in that author's scenario for the reader and one that relies on the everyday as its backdrop.

Petrushevskaiia is notorious for her irreverent treatment of a group that has long attempted to distance itself from the mundane *byt* it chronicles: the intelligentsia (Shcheglova 24). The dethroning of the intellectual as moral authority unites Petrushevskaiia with other perestroika-era women writers such as Gorlanova and Elena Tarasova.<sup>69</sup> Would-be rapist Zhora in *Svoi krug* is writing his dissertation, while "Ali-Baba" describes the bed-wetting alcoholic scientist Viktor (Petrushevskaiia 1998, 329-30, 66). These Petrushevskaiia characters are far more reprehensible than their intellectual counterparts in the works of Grekova, Baranskaia, or those of the canonical

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<sup>69</sup> The deformed misanthropic protagonist in Tarasova's "Ne pomniashchaia zla" (She Who Remembers No Evil) comes from an intellectual family that does not understand her, while Gorlanova describes a writers' organization as a pretext to drink heavily (*Ne pomniashchaia zla* 195; *Abstinentki* 12). Tolstaia's "Ogon' i pyl'" (Fire and Dust) contrasts Pipka's earthy sensuality with the repressed jealousy of intellectual Rimma (*Chisten'kaia zhizn'* 266-67). Illustrating the incongruity between image and act demythologizes the intelligentsia, suggesting it is closer to *byt's* carnal passions and problems than it wishes to acknowledge.

Iurii Trifonov (Katz 1992, 99). As Sergei Zalygin succinctly summarizes the situation, Petrushevskaiia and Tolstaia, unlike Trifonov, are not afraid to describe the intelligentsia as “freaks” (1991, 226).

This repeated mention of Trifonov is not accidental. Women writers’ often amoral fictional personae differ from those of their male predecessor. The weak-willed Diment'ev in Trifonov’s *Obmen* (The Exchange, 1969) is far less repugnant than the sadistic mother in *Svoi krug* or Tarasova’s physically and spiritually crippled heroine. Where Trifonov describes the intellectual as mired in moral quandaries, perestroika-era women authors show how the intelligentsia creates and perpetuates its unsavory ethical dilemmas. These problems arise from his own discussion of how everyday life tests the individual: “*Byt* is the test of life, in which a contemporary morality appears and is tried out” (Trifonov 1972, 65; qtd. in Kolesnikoff 46). Characters such as Petrushevskaiia’s Zhora and Tarasova’s deformed protagonist imply that the intelligentsia not only fails this test but is inherently corrupt.

There are two reasons that the intelligentsia was more extensively critiqued during perestroika. The first relates to intellectuals’ collective self-image and their near monopoly on literature published before the early 1990s. The intelligentsia saw itself as a moral counterbalance to other classes, a viewpoint inherited from opposition to the nineteenth-century petty bourgeoisie (Borsiakov 61). Cramped living conditions were also a factor. Throughout most of the Soviet period the intelligentsia found itself in the close quarters of the *kommunalka*, producing what Svetlana Boym sees as a siege mentality (130-34).<sup>70</sup> Ruth Zernova, ostensibly

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<sup>70</sup> Iurii Olesha's novella *Zavist'* (Envy, 1927) shows that this attitude predated Stalinism, while Marina Kulakova’s “Gimn Avtozavoda” (Hymn to Auto Factory, 1995), written about a

surveying Soviet women's writing, exemplifies this attitude in a digressive critique of Stalinist informers as working-class upstarts destroying the righteous intelligentsia (169). Her comments castigate a society in which usurpers of culture and living space trample the intellectuals.<sup>71</sup>

Second, almost all of Baranskaia's and Grekova's heroines come from the intelligentsia, including *Nedelia kak nedelia*'s scientist Ol'ga and dean Mar'ia Vladimirovna in *Damskii master*. The cliché of the hard-working but bland scientist-engineer was a mainstay of post-Stalinist literature by both men and women (Briker and Vishevskii 148-49). Linked through background to both character and implied reader, female authors before perestroika highlighted the predicament of the well-educated woman managing home and work. Authors such as Petrushevskaiia and Gorlanova, who built on others' precedence of portraying such personae, had no need to establish women intellectuals as legitimate characters: they could rely on a set of ready-made patterns and on reader expectations. Instead, their prose rebelled against the Baranskaia/Grekova career intellectual as another cliché, ironically duplicating the disgust at unrealistic depictions of working women that had prompted Baranskaia to write *Nedelia kak nedelia* (Baranskaia 1988, 30).

While Trifonov had selectively depicted the moral shortcomings of the intelligentsia, perestroika women's writing elaborated on this corruption through both physical and spiritual

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working-class neighborhood in Nizhnii Novgorod, indicates that the antagonism between the intelligentsia and the proletariat outlasted the USSR.

<sup>71</sup> Women authors' attack on the intelligentsia contradicted both the precedents of Russian literature and perestroika's rehabilitation of the oppressed intellectual class. Goscilo remarks on the archeological impulse of *glasnost*': exhuming and rediscovering decades of silenced intellectual and literary figures (1990, xxxi-xxxii).

images.<sup>72</sup> Elena Gessen discerns the evident lack of morality in Petrushevskaiia's "lumpen" intelligentsia (1989, 177). However, Petrushevskaiia's prose does not unmask the intelligentsia so much as use physiological metaphors (drinking, sex, deformity) to show inner decay. "Since the violation of the psyche, which is [the author's] ruling obsession, carries the taboo of ultimate sin, it cannot be represented directly, and therefore gets displaced onto the body" (Goscilo 1992, 13).

When Petrushevskaiia and Tarasova make the private public by depicting corporeality, they echo the axiom that the body expresses the sufferings of the soul.<sup>73</sup> However, their use of the intelligentsia as the arena for this relationship separates perestroika-era women writers both from their male counterparts and from the more staid accounts of Baranskaia and Grekova. This difference signifies the revenge of the material world, hinting that the intelligentsia is both fallible and perhaps even redundant: what is the role of ideas in a world of poverty, drunkenness, and violence?

Critics were shocked by women authors' treatment of the intelligentsia. Scandalized readers "recognized" themselves in *Svoi krug* and hastened to write that they were not as the story portrayed them (Gessen 1991, 208). While these responses in a sense followed Petrushevskaiia's claimed expectations for the reader, identification with the characters caused defensive outrage instead of compassion for the less fortunate. Some critics conflated the author

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<sup>72</sup> Such demystification of the intellectual class had its precedents. A closer look at city prose reveals an ambivalent intelligentsia tainted by Stagnation culture: Diment'ev may have been led astray by Lena, but Trifonov's treacherous Glebov inherited the corruption of the Stalinist House on the Embankment without any female assistance.

<sup>73</sup> Nina Gabrielian discusses how women's prose describes the ailing soul through the body's problems—such an analysis places this literature's roots in traditional culture (2001, 151).

with her unsavory characters, despite Petrushevskaiia's attempt to distance herself from the diegesis (Kostiukov 4; Ovenasian 1992, 249).

During the late 1980s and early 1990s women's prose addressed traditional gender roles in a manner resembling its treatment of the intelligentsia: systematic critique through exposure of previously unmentionable weaknesses. Discussion was more sustained and critical than that of earlier generations, which had accepted strictly gendered behavior while selectively depicting the shortcomings that resulted from such strictures (e.g., Baranskaia's nobly suffering mothers and weak husbands).

Perestroika-era women authors describe the contemporary Soviet man in extremely unflattering terms.<sup>74</sup> Negative models predominate, uniting various generations and roles. The literally and psychologically greedy Andrei in *Vremia noch'* is a recidivist version of Grekova's Vadim before the latter's Dostoevskian redemption. Characters' fates overlap: the alcoholic son in Petrushevskaiia's "Pchelka" (Little Bee) passes out in his mother's kitchen, while the sculptor in Viktoriia Tokareva's *Piat' figur na postamente* (Five Figures on a Pedestal, 1987) has drinking binges in his studio (Petrushevskaiia 2000, 143; Tokareva 2002, 398).

Men's alcoholism reflects entitlement as well as the failure of a sobriety campaign that merely restricted access without addressing social issues (Takala 264). Andrei's drinking is culturally sanctioned as normal male behavior, while his sister's and mother's drinking would be

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<sup>74</sup> There are some positive images. In *Chisten'kaia zhizn'* Natal'ia Sukhanova's Anton Apollonar'evich sees all pregnant women as beautiful, while in *Nepomniashchaia zla* Galina Volodina's Mishka tries to help the troubled family of his lover. These men attempt to enact patriarchal roles within contexts dominated by women: Anton Apollonar'evich is the head of a maternity ward and Mishka is the only stable male presence among the alcoholic relatives.

unacceptable because of their “natural” obligation to care for home and children. Males, however, may imbibe to escape the pressures of domestic life. Indeed, one reader of the newspaper *Komsomol'skaia pravda* (Young Communist Truth) argues that nagging wives often drive husbands to drink, with these rebukes no doubt increasing along with the amount consumed (Tarkhova 123-24).

Sober men are also essentially disappointing, much more than in earlier works (e.g., relatively hardworking Dima in *Nedelia kak nedelia*). Absent or dubious fathers predominate: the father of Alena’s unborn child is probably the married assistant director who will never see her again (Petrushevskaja 1998, 410). The taxi driver in “Medeia” may have slept with his fourteen-year old daughter, causing her mother to kill her with an axe (Petrushevskaja 1998, 224; Grothe 234-35). This scenario of incest, with its Dostoevskian overtones, is starker than anything published earlier. Baranskaia’s Zoika was raped by her stepfather, not a biological relation, and was ultimately redeemed by a happy marriage and children of her own.

In many cases perestroika women’s writing enunciates the thesis implied in works such as Venedikt Erofeev’s *Moskva-Petushki*: the Soviet system emasculates men. Mar'a-Leena Raunio summarizes this *idée fixe* in the same article that details her failed writing career:

В обществе, где все его члены забиты и задавлены, мужчины не могут быть великодушны к «слабому полу». [. . .] [П]риниженный, задавленный человек получает хоть какое-то удовлетворение от сознания, что есть еще более слабые и загнанные. (*Мария* 1990, 272)

In a society where all members are beaten down and crushed, men cannot be generous to the “weak sex.” [. . .] A humbled, crushed person can derive at least

some satisfaction from knowing that there are some who are weaker and more exhausted.

Raunio both defends and critiques the “unnaturally” weak Soviet man. Robbed of his innate masculine dignity, he exploits women as the only group more downtrodden than himself. The result is the author’s own living situation, in which husband-children-mother function as a trio of dependents for whom Raunio alone is responsible. In blaming the Soviet state for oppressing and thus emasculating men, she, like Baranskaia, exonerates males from answering for their actions (Baranskaia 1988, 34).

Lina Tarkhova provides a related reason for the ineffectual Soviet male: the “strong” Soviet woman. Imploring women to reverse men’s tendency to surrender responsibility, Tarkhova argues that families headed by women are the culprits. This situation can only be rectified if mothers renounce leadership and focus energy on nurturing their husbands with love (Tarkhova 124-25). Tarkhova’s advice, allegedly gleaned from sociological and psychological research, repeats what Vera Dunham noticed about female characters in 1950s literature: women were urged to surrender wartime gains and compensate for men’s shortcomings (Tarkhova 124; Dunham 1960, 479).<sup>75</sup>

Whereas Tarkhova and to a lesser extent Raunio imply that a change in social roles can restore man’s (presumably) invigorating essence, Nina Sadur’s “Chervivyi synok” (Worm-Eaten

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<sup>75</sup> An analogous trend occurred in the United States in the postwar decades. In 1960 a US official made the observation that: “When a woman comes to be viewed first as a source of manpower, second as a mother, then I think that we are losing much that supposedly separates us from the Communist world” (Sealander 139-40; qtd. in Hartmann 86). In this instance gender ideology, e.g., upholding women’s “natural” place by the hearth, subsumes political differences.



Sonny) dashes all such hope. This short *skaz*-influenced sketch damns man, who has been bitten by a demon causing him to consume women and then leave them. The narrator ironically laments that women were not assigned this destructive role.

Укусил бы лучше женщину. Чтобы она мужчину бы растлевала, лишала бы его невинности, будущего, выпивала бы его и бросала одного стареть. Чтоб мужчины стали женщинами, а женщины мужчинами. (*Не помнящая зла* 235)

It would have been better to bite women. So that she could corrupt man, deprive him of *his* innocence and future, drink him down, leave him to grow old alone. So that men would become women, and women men. (Sadur 1995, 203-04, italics in original).

Sadur appropriates postlapsarian rhetoric to revise the Adam/Eve dichotomy. The narrator is interested in reversing gender inequality, not erasing it: the unequal power dynamic remains but the balance of power now favors women.

Tarasova's "Ty khorosho nachilsia est', Adam" (You Learned How to Eat Well, Adam) in *Novye amazonki* continues the references to rapacious behavior: men destroy their health, relationships with women, and the exotic pets they bring home for their children. Unlike the males whom "Chervivyi synok" describes, however, man also consumes himself through the institution of the army. For Tarasova he is both destroyer and victim, evoking one of the Dostoevskian patterns Dalton-Brown ascribes to Petrushevskaiia. Unlike with Raskol'nikov (or Grekova's Vadim), Tarasova and Sadur allow no redemption: man's own appetites devour him.

No women's writing published before 1985 offers such a harsh and systematic assessment of masculinity. Aside from the political nuances of Tarasova's critique of the Soviet army, both she and Sadur offer gendered polemics threatening permanence and meaning. Female

authors' assertion of *telesnost'* impedes the idea-driven struggle to build communism. If man, the architect of the October revolution, is merely a lecherous glutton, then physiology will always frustrate his dreams of social change.

Perestroika-era women's prose also critiques traditional conceptions of femininity. Oleg Dark describes *Svoi krug* as inhabited by "not-quite men" and "not-quite women" (*nedomuzhchiny* and *nedozhenshchiny*), while Marina Abasheva is starker: "Non-mother. Non-housewife. Non-wife. In general, an anti-world is described. [. . .] This is a world where everything is its opposite" (Dark 1991, 261; Abasheva 11). While Dark suggests the possibility of improving his grownup Mitrofanushkas, Abasheva employs the overarching perestroika tendency to negate: there is no escape from the anti-world. This standpoint severs women from their traditional nurturing roles, just as, according to Tarkhova, strong women have estranged men from their biologically predetermined ascendancy.

Women authors in the late 1980s and early 1990s sharply questioned the validity and viability of gender roles in a way that their predecessors during Thaw and Stagnation did not. While Baranskaia and Grekova display an assortment of irresponsible fathers, truly "bad" mothers do not exist: this type of personage would contradict their worldviews. In *Damskii master* Mar'ia Vladimirovna's children jokingly characterize her as a brood-sow who may eat her piglets (Grekova 2002, 9). Such alarming images, however, remain at the level of humor without the disturbing overtones of later portrayals, e.g., Anna Andrianovna describing grandmother Sima as a devouring half-shark/half-Nazi (Petrushevskiaia 1998, 436).

Perestroika women's prose mars the "terrible perfection" of the Turgenev maiden and Baranskaia's martyr-mothers as hope of family and country (Heldt 1987, 12). There are two

striking variants in this negation of the traditional feminine image: *durochka* and *urodina*.<sup>76</sup> Tat'iana Meleshko identifies the *durochka* as a key image in Tolstaia's "Ogon' i pyl'," in which Pipka attracts men despite her rotted teeth (Meleshko 3-4).

The *urodina* is the *durochka* without God's guidance. The nameless protagonist in "Ne pomniashchaia zla" is hideously deformed by a mysterious illness that began when she was a small child (*Ne pomniashchaia zla* 204). Her identity comes from the suffering ironically expressed in the title and final line of the story: the main character remembers evil and uses these thoughts to structure and define her reality. Nothing exists outside of her physical and spiritual torment. Within this context the narrator amends the traditional concept of the soul being reflected in the body:

Думала раньше: душа повторяет тело, его форму; она так же осязаема. Тело лишится пальца—его лишится душа, она лишится зуба—его лишится душа. Но тело можно протезировать, а душа так и останется беззубой, безногой, беспалой. (*Не помнящая зла* 191)

She used to think that the soul duplicated the body, its form, and was just as palpable. If the body loses a finger, then the soul loses it; if it loses a tooth then the soul loses it. But the body can get artificial limbs, and the soul will remain without a tooth, leg, and finger.

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<sup>76</sup> The *durochka* is a holy fool figure existing outside of accepted social conventions, but endowed with a God-given right to critique them, while the *urodina* is a physically deformed person who may or may not have a special spiritual status (Dal' v.1, 501; v. 4, 508). Vasilenko's "novel-hagiography" *Durochka* (Little Fool, 1998) elaborates on the former.

This formulation suggests a heretical correlation between physical loss and spiritual mutilation. On a theological level Tarasova undermines the idea of the immortal soul, a concept supporting the opposition between the eternal *bytie* and the ephemeral *byt*. While Stephen Hutchings posits that *byt* comes from the gap between Orthodox icon and image, Tarasova implies that both the *obraz* and its physical counterpart can be harmed by the physical world (Hutchings 37). The fact that these thoughts occur to a thirty-three year-old woman implies a parallel between her and Christ (*Ne pomniashchaia zla* 190). The protagonist, however, is interested neither in saving her own life nor in redeeming anyone else's. The suffering she embraces is not kenotic but pointless physical pain: such a scenario questions a key tenet of Orthodoxy, not to mention the efforts of Baranskaia's stoic heroines.<sup>77</sup>

Women's prose also revises the literary depiction of the wife. As Abasheva observes, satisfied wives and mothers are rare in perestroika women's prose—this paucity continues a trend evident in the writing of Baranskaia, Grekova, and the early works of Tokareva. Polina Slutskina's Nina is an ideal homemaker taken to a psychiatric hospital after dreaming of drowning in the meat aspic prepared for her husband's guests (*Abstinentki* 84). Nina has everything a Soviet wife would want: the role itself destroys her. The matter-of-fact narration of how a wife is driven insane by domesticity conveys that Slutskina believes that the story's premise is shocking enough to redeem its pedestrian style. Of all the homemakers of the 1960s-

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<sup>77</sup> Petrushevskaiia's mannish alcoholic Nad'ka seems almost spiritual compared to Tarasova's character. When the hairdressers Svetochka and Natashka go to find her after a long absence, a relative tells them that Nad'ka waited for their visit to die (Petrushevskaiia 2000, 32). Here too there is no redeeming conclusion: only the prick of their temporarily awakened conscience will remind the two of Nad'ka's suffering.

1980s, Nina is most akin to Vera in the early section of Grekova's *Khoziaika gostinitsy*: neither knows that her expectations should exceed those of a beloved servant.

Perestroika women authors' maternal characters diverge even more sharply from those of their predecessors. Petrushevskaiia demolishes the figure of the strong woman that Baranskaia canonized in her stolidly suffering widows and mothers (Katz 1998, 195). Sadomasochistic Anna Andrianovna epitomizes the Petrushevskaiian maternal megalomaniac, erasing the boundaries between self and others as she smothers her children and grandchildren with hate, overprotection, and the material and spiritual poverty of her own life.

In this sense Kristin Peterson misreads Petrushevskaiia's mothers when she hopefully sees them building happiness through providing for their children—while love for Alesha may be part of the narrator's motivation in *Svoi krug*, it exists alongside the selfishness and cruelty that is paramount in *Vremia noch'* and other works (253). We should instead investigate how and why Petrushevskaiia robs motherhood of its culturally valorized status (Shokhina n.p.; qtd. in Bavin 34).<sup>78</sup> Petrushevskaiia develops Ol'ga Ivanovna's idea in *Vdovii parokhod* that maternal love is a debilitating disease: motherhood can cause loss of independence and judgment (Grekova 1986, 369). She illustrates much more explicitly than Baranskaia and Grekova how the plight of mothers goes unnoticed by the government—Anna Andrianovna's miserable pension would

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<sup>78</sup> While the narrators in *Vremia noch'* and *Svoi krug* use their protection of children to justify transgression, the unnamed young mother in "Ditia" (The Child) abandons her newborn under a pile of rocks (Petrushevskaiia 1998, 67). The vengeful wife in "Medeia" is a variation on Abasheva's anti-woman with strong connections to the characters of Dostoyevsky: the wife who destroys what she (presumably) loves the most in order to harm her husband. Liudmila Ulitskaia's novel of the same name would later revise this pattern.

barely suffice for one person, let alone her family of indigents. These quotidian problems, her works hint, parallel the underlying moral poverty of Russian society.

Women's prose points to both the problematics of traditional gender roles and the state's indifference to or denigration of women. Before 1985 negative representations of the government were restricted to either corrupt local figures (Matiutin in *Damskii master*) or, during the Thaw, the cult of personality as a phenomenon removed from the present regime. Grekova's "Letom v gorode" could allude to illegal abortions during Stalinism, but dissection of transhistorical anti-Semitism in *Svezho predanie* made the latter work completely unprintable.

Perestroika, however, opened discussion of all periods and aspects of the Soviet government. Women's prose centers on two aspects of state action: neglect of women and connections to violence. Neglect of women in post-1985 works almost always involves the much-maligned medical system. As noted in Chapter Two, descriptions of the Soviet hospital are inherited from earlier women's works (*Sozvezdie bliznetsov*) and those of male authors (Solzhenitsyn's *Rakovyi korpus*). Indifference towards women within the hospital topoi underscores humiliation and loss of agency through terrifying conditions. Both of these issues existed in pre-1985 works but, to borrow a description of gulag writing, were survivable and limited in their horrors (Toker 48-49).<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Goscilo argues that the prison and hospital have a common reliance on clock time and small-scale tasks (1996a, 120). The camp and medical systems both rob the individual of the autonomy traditionally paired with masculine roles—in this sense they highlight the limited freedom and focus on authority marking Soviet society as a whole. At times authors critique this abysmal situation through irony. In Gorlanova's "Istoriia ozera Veselogo" (How Lake Jolly Came About) Masha gives birth alone inside a decrepit hospital that, along with the town itself, has officially

Soviet medicine is an ideal locus for Petrushevskaiia's themes and narrative exposition. Incontinent Sima and Malen'kaia Groznaia (Little Terrible) in the story of the same name show the psychiatric hospital as the nadir of human experience. Much like Solzhenitsyn's scientists in *V krughe pervom* (The First Circle), the two elderly women move from the mild "first circle" (an ordinary hospital) to a more torturous realm of hell. The telling title of Marina Palei's *Otdel propavshikh* (The Bloody Women's Ward, *Glas* 3) precedes an account of how overworked and unpaid personnel maim, insult, and simply ignore patients in the abortion ward. Tat'iana Rovenskaia identifies one result of this neglect: a specifically female sense of shame associated with the body in public institutions (hospital, school, abortion clinic, and so forth) (1999, 217). As with Iuliia Gradskova's accusations concerning lack of women's agency, Rovenskaia sees this feeling as a widespread effect of state policy (Gradskova 92).

In a complete break with their predecessors, women writers during perestroika also indicted the state for systematic violence. Sometimes this critique occurs through images that characterize the environment as the victim. Vasilenko's short story "Suslik" (Gopher) portrays how sixth-grade students flush out and kill gophers in a competition to collect the skins (*Zhenskaia logika* 100-01). *Shamara* shows one possible result of inculcating violence and scorn for the natural world in adolescents: the albino officer Maks and rapist Ustin. Their town is poisoned by the factories on its outskirts, the factories themselves running on prison labor. The

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been converted into a lake (*Ne pomniashchaia zla* 52, 56). Neither the medical facility nor its surroundings matter to the Moscow bureaucrats, who suddenly resettle the local population, destroy the area, and create the fabled lake (complete with fish). This arbitrary act stresses lack of individual agency more than the state's benevolent concern.

use of convicts in industry evokes images of the vast gulag, a toxic legacy leaching into Soviet public life. The novella's opening scene shows the protagonist dancing on the sandy bank of the Akhtuba River.

Но вдруг на том берегу показались бронетранспортеры. Неповоротливо-стремительные, как крокодили, заходили они в воду, тупо мордами уставившись на нее, танцующую. Плыли прямо к ней, охваченные похотью. Плыли стадом, стремительно. (*Не помнящая зла* 83)

Suddenly, on the other bank, the armored troop carriers appeared. Languid but quick, like crocodiles, they entered the water, their snouts staring vacantly at her as she danced. They moved right toward her, overcome by lust. They moved fast, in a herd. (Vasilenko 1999, 3)

As in “Suslik,” state activity disrupts the natural world. The Soviet government, metonymically reduced to armored personnel carriers, is a herd of single-minded predators converging on Shamara.<sup>80</sup> For Vasilenko these images constitute a gendered division where men can destroy the world, while women have the ability to save it. This (essentialist) realization came during the Cuban Missile Crisis: Vasilenko and other children were evacuated from their military town as

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<sup>80</sup> This scene foreshadows Ustin's account of how he and seven others raped his future wife in the snow, for which he was imprisoned by Maks, who is driving one of the vehicles on the riverbank (*Ne pomniashchaia zla* 89). Maks later handcuffs Shamara and has sex with her in exchange for his agreeing to Ustin's release, thus reifying Gradsikova's idea of the female body controlled by the state (*Ne pomniashchaia zla* 112-14). Here, however, the narrative shows that women participate in their own victimization (e.g., sleeping with Maks for Ustin's sake).



her father sat in one of the command posts responsible for launching the USSR's nuclear arsenal (2001, 89). The state, troped as male, has the power to end the life its female citizens create.

Karpova's "Lovlia maiskikh zhukov" (Catching May Bugs), virtually ignored by critics, is a powerful story structured around state-sanctioned violence against women. Beginning with the narrator's music teacher putting his hand down her pants when she was seven, the work immediately establishes itself as printable only after 1985 (*Chisten'kaia zhizn'* 68). Guards from a nearby labor camp then accost her older sister on the road, initiating a flashback to her earlier, Stalinist childhood, when guards from the same camp threatened her mother while she took the narrator to kindergarten (*Chisten'kaia zhizn'* 72). The flashback ends with the scene of the guards' crude proposal to the narrator's sister. Using the prison slang "matsat" (to put to use), they convey a word unfamiliar to the girls but clear in meaning (*Bol'shoi slovar' russkogo zhargona* 342).

Это было то самое, в чем я только начинала ревниво уличать ее тело, воровски разглядывая сквозь опущенные ресницы сестру, когда она раздевалась к сну. [. . .] И об этом тоже нельзя было говорить, невозможно было называть это словом. (*Чистенькая жизнь* 78)

It was the same thing as when I was just beginning to jealously look over her body with furtive glances through lowered lashes when my sister undressed for sleep. And that was also impossible to talk about, one could not give it a name.

The narrator cannot put this new knowledge into speech, just as her childhood has been "hollowed out," silenced and deformed by sexual abuse and the threat of rape within the general dissipated terror of Stalinism (*Chisten'kaia zhizn'* 79). Karpova's narrative is motivated and

shaped by sexual violence and a fear similar to the shame Rovenskaia attaches to women's bodies in public.

Elena Glinka's "'Kolymskii tramvai' srednei tiazhesti" (Kolyma Streetcar, Medium Size, 1989) even more explicitly connects the state to violence.<sup>81</sup> Glinka, imprisoned in 1950 for being in Nazi-occupied Novorossiisk, describes a probably autobiographical encounter between political and criminal prisoners (Trofimova 1994, 215). Local "free" men and prisoners, having heard that women have arrived, come to greet them. What follows is the main event of the story: an unspecified number of women prisoners are dragged into a nearby building and raped for two days (Glinka 112-13).

Glinka prefaces this account with a denunciation of both the Stalinist gulag and those supporting the dictator. "Kolymskii tramvai" appeared only a year after Leningrad teacher Nina Andreeva's pro-Stalin letter, one of the key conservative reactions against perestroika (Gorbanevskii and Mochalov 16). Throughout the story the first-person narrator contributes generalizing comments underscoring the brutality of the Stalinist camps. These moments reinforce the work's anti-Stalinist message while giving it an overbearing didacticism. Both aspects exemplify the perestroika tendency to critique on a systematic basis.

Khava Volovich, one of the few non-intellectuals to write about imprisonment in the labor camps, describes the period following her arrest and imprisonment in 1937. Although the labor camp as a space is a priori removed from the everyday, her formulation applies to Soviet women's lives in general: there is "a wish to wipe from memory the years of torment and

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<sup>81</sup> This discussion of Glinka and Khava Volovich is adapted from Benjamin Sutcliffe, "Documenting Women's Voices in Perestroika Gulag Narratives," *Toronto Slavic Quarterly*, (Winter 2002-2003), <http://www.utoronto.ca/slavic/tsq/032002/sutcliffe.html>.

privation, but also a feeling of shame. This is the same feeling experienced by a girl whose honor has been stolen by the man she loves” (*Dodnes' tiagoteet* 477). Volovich implicitly politicizes both the shame Rovenskaia identifies and the powerlessness Gradskaia and Raunio ascribe to the Soviet woman. This feeling of group victimization by the state divides perestroika women authors from those who came before them: Ol'ga in *Nedelia kak nedelia* took pride in advancing Soviet science, as did Grekova's female researchers in *Kafedra*.

Women's writing after 1985 attacked assumptions that the state supported women (if not always successfully). Authors such as Petrushevskiaia and Tarasova likewise destabilize the cult of motherhood, ascendancy of beauty, and other elements of femininity. Critique of traditional roles, however, has its limits: negative depictions of same-sex love indicate that Petrushevskiaia does not wish to blur gender lines.<sup>82</sup> These accounts suggest that homosexuality is both abnormal and often coerced, effectively grouping gays and lesbians alongside the homeless and alcoholics as victims of Soviet society.<sup>83</sup>

As with depictions of male homosexuality, lesbianism in women's writing is far from positive. Drunken co-workers rape Gulia, the unattractive lesbian in “Muzyka ada” (The Music of Hell), after she unsuccessfully attempts to seduce the female protagonist (Petrushevskiaia

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<sup>82</sup> Andrei was probably raped in Butyrka Prison, while Serezha's long homosexual affair in “Shato” (The Chateau) costs his family time and money (Petrushevskiaia 1998, 370; Petrushevskiaia 2000, 94).

<sup>83</sup> An anthology of Russian male homosexual prose appeared in the late 1990s and then only abroad in English translation: *Out of the Blue: Russia's Hidden Gay Literature. An Anthology*. The editors of *Abstinentki* planned anthologies of gay and feminist prose, but the typesetters refused to help produce them (Azhgikhina interview 2003).

1998, 85). Androgynous Nadia in “Muzhestvennost' i zhenstvennost” (Masculinity and Femininity) suffers because doctors believe that she falls between the definitions of male and female (Petrushevskaiia 1998, 187). Deviation entails disaster: either medical incarceration or sexual violence. The kind hermaphrodite Lera in *Shamara* is a rare exception to this brutal enforcement of gender norms, hinting that Vasilenko is a less strident defender of clear divisions between male and female despite her emphasis on women as preservers of the world.

Resistance to discussing homosexuality within a normalized context qualifies the critique of gender stereotypes. Entrenched homophobia presupposes firmly chaining male and female identity to procreation. Baranskaia’s fiction clearly asserts that a woman is complete only when producing and raising children. However, the otherwise iconoclastic Petrushevskaiia also reiterates a basic need for both sexes to continue the human race, as the ending of “Novye Robinzony” (The New Family Robinson, 1995) and the fates of her sexually “deviant” characters illustrate (Petrushevskaiia 2002, 110-11). These scenarios constitute a sharp demarcation of male and female roles that restrict men and women, as Eve Sedgwick’s discussion of homosexuality in the West avers:

[C]ategories presented in a culture as symmetrical binary oppositions—heterosexual/homosexual, in this case—actually subsist in a more unsettled and dynamic tacit relation according to which [. . .] term B is not symmetrical with but subordinate to term A. (9-10)

Normative heterosexuality marginalizes homosexuality. Sedgwick’s formulation is even too optimistic for perestroika literature, where homosexuality is less a recognized opposition than a shadow, frightening in its dark and amorphous nature.

Women's prose during perestroika systematically critiqued traditional gender roles within the era's esthetic of negation and exposure of the previously private and taboo. This acerbic assessment, often demythologizing the intelligentsia, occurs alongside critical evaluation of the Stalinist and present Soviet state as either neglecting or victimizing women. Images of homosexuality, however, suggest that writers such as Petrushevskaja discard some stereotypes (loving mother, ideal homemaker) while upholding others (prison "bitch," ugly lesbian).

### **3.2. Catastrophe and Discourse: Chronotope, Crisis, Conversation**

Pre-1985 women's writing associated the chronotope of crisis with individual experiences presumably shared by other women. Permanent semi-private spaces (the *kommunalka*) and transient public ones (the hospital ward, line, and so forth) shaped the relationship between space and temporality. Perestroika women's prose broadened the scope of the chronotope and made its contexts more extreme through two innovations: the depiction of catastrophe and the replacement of documented actions with discourse (i.e., conversation guided by persuasion through discernible strategy). While the first of these emphasizes space, the second stresses temporality.

Gorlanova and Natal'ia Doroshko exemplify how the chronotope of crisis underpins descriptions of collective or national catastrophe. As Raunio and Larisa Vasil'eva argue, everyday life during perestroika for both men and women was a constant series of difficulties: higher food prices, massive layoffs (especially among the intelligentsia), and so forth. These quotidian events occurred alongside concern over the crumbling Soviet empire.

Doroshko's "Dvadtsat' piatoe fevralia" (February Twenty-fifth), published in *Abstinentki*, describes Jews awaiting a perestroika-era pogrom that never comes. The pogrom is an archetypal nightmare for both the Jewish and gentile intelligentsia: for Jews, as Grekova's discussion of national anti-Semitism implies, the pogrom is an omnipresent (if remote) possibility confirming their marginal place in Russian culture (Grekova 2002, 221). For gentiles it signals the same elemental forces—the common people—that could destroy the intelligentsia as a whole, revealing its powerlessness during times of crisis.<sup>84</sup>

Gorlanova gives two accounts of the industrial city Perm' during perestroika. In *Abstinentki* "Chto-to khoroshee" (Something Good) describes the chaos a false air raid wreaks on the city's residents, already testy after weeks without water. Her "Pokaiannye dni, ili V ozhidanii kontsa sveta" (Confessional Days, or Waiting for the End of the World) opens the *Novye amazonki* collection. Its autobiographical narrator attempts to support her family during perestroika, when Perm' is awash with rumors of natural catastrophe (an impending flood) and civil unrest (news items documenting the rise of anti-Semitism). As in Doroshko's story, time first thickens around an expected event, then returns to normal when the tragedy does not occur. Both works pair anti-Semitism with an assault on Soviet-era stability, when pogroms were condemned as Tsarist racism. The narrator, Nina Viktorovna, notes that her family must be fed despite the possible disasters. While earlier chronotopes of crisis centered on apartment battles in *Vdovii parokhod* or the lines in *Nedelia kak nedelia*, during the Gorbachev period increased openness and uncertainty meant it also inhabited the headlines.

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<sup>84</sup> The upsurge in anti-Semitism, which began during perestroika and has continued in the post-Soviet era, caused Dina Rubina and several other Jewish authors to emigrate.

The shift from portraying crisis to displaying discourse contrasts with previous women's writing, in which actions help accumulate documented examples of the female quotidian. In earlier works, accretion, details, and plot encourage the reader to make connections between the specifics of one woman's life and generalized experience.<sup>85</sup> Petrushevskaiia provides two of the best examples of discourse's triumph in the chronotope of crisis.<sup>86</sup> *Svoi krug*'s scheming first-person narrator gives the reader no choice but to accept her view of what occurs. As in the first portion of Dostoyevsky's *Zapiski iz podpol'ia* (Notes from Underground, 1864), very little transpires, aside from the final scene involving Alesha, his mother, and her friends—monolog takes the place of action. Gessen observes the difficulty of determining the main event in a Petrushevskaiia story: temporality and the events it orders are less real than the narrator's chatter, advice, and gossip (1989, 176-77). This tendency unites the author's oeuvre and through the choice of colloquialism, slang, and jargon locates a character's space in time (Vladimirova 1977,

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<sup>85</sup> This strategy influences titles: Baranskaia's *Nedelia kak nedelia* describes a week like any other, while many institutes have a faculty like Grekova's *Kafedra*. Literature by male authors (e.g., Trifonov's *Obmen*) in the 1960s and 1970s also shows this trend.

<sup>86</sup> Tolstaia also subordinates plot to what first appears to be idle talk. Pipka's errant narratives harness geography and a bizarre kind of logic to the desire-based discourse motivating her wild tales (*Chisten'kaia zhizn'* 263, 268). These fantastic stories resemble the female picaresque, a genre previously unknown to Russian literature. Mastering discourse gives Pipka an alternate control over temporality, power that the jealous intellectual Rimma lacks as she realizes time is slipping away from her (*Chisten'kaia zhizn'* 267). Temporality, like language, is a way for Tolstaia to transform the mundane female quotidian into a realm of infinite albeit imaginary possibilities (Goscilo 1994b, 221-22).

162). Such an observation echoes Mikhail Bakhtin's conception of novelistic language interacting with authorial point of view: the "languages of heteroglossia [. . .] are specific points of view on the world, forms for conceptualizing the world in words, specific world views, each characterized by its own objects, meanings and values" (1992, 291-92).

Anna Andrianovna, the most masterful of Petrushevskaja's egomaniacal narrators, lays bare the close relationship between discourse and self-representation. From the beginning she establishes her narrative as a confession of faith where maternal love is the overarching rationale. A semi-professional poet, Anna Andrianovna is no stranger to manipulating words for her own ends. When Leonid Kostiukov accuses Petrushevskaja of using incompetent narrators to hide her own poor writing style, he betrays his own inability to assess Anna Andrianovna's mix of high-culture references and Soviet clichés (4). In her ceaseless battles with the family she purports to cherish, she reads and rewrites Alena's diary from her daughter's viewpoint, complete with a scene detailing "Alena's" opinions on a conflict between mother and daughter (Petrushevskaja 1998, 408-09). *Vremia noch'* is ultimately an elaborate series of self-justifications where the reader is pretext and audience. These mental peregrinations conclude with a non-event revealing the essential emptiness of the narrator's existence: the decision not to bring Sima home is followed by the realization that the rest of the family has abandoned her.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> As with all other aspects of the narrative, the reader depends on Anna Andrianovna's conception of temporality. Reliance on orality privileges a present tense that in turn intensifies feeling (Hielscher 1996, 185; Nevzgliadova 259). In this respect the stream-of-consciousness conclusion heightens the crisis surrounding Anna Andrianovna as the reader drowns in her maelstrom of anxiety.



Evocation of catastrophe and the move from documentation to discourse as methods of characterizing *byt* indicate that Doroshko, Gorlanova, and Petrushevskaiia see the USSR as a society where the individual, having few alternatives, is victimized by more powerful forces. Such reduced agency nullifies the cult of personal responsibility Baranskaia advances, insinuating that the moral choices she and Grekova examine in works such as *Den' pominoveniia* and *Kafedra* have little impact on their characters' lives.<sup>88</sup>

Women authors represent crisis and discourse through a temporality of repetition and aimlessness grounded in *byt*. The introduction to *Ne pomniashchaia zla* makes a banal but crucial assertion: women's prose "exists as a necessity, dictated by time and space" (3). Both dimensions, the discussion continues, stem from everyday life:

Однако надо помнить, что для женщины замкнутый бытовой круг, круг ада,—это еще и круг жизни, предлагающий нескончаемость пути, его высокое постоянство. (*Не помнящая зла* 4)

However, we must remember that for women the closed circle of *byt*, the circle of hell, is also the circle of life, offering the never-ending journey that is its constant.

The closed expanse of *byt*, infinite within its confines, both provides opportunities and demarcates women's experiences.<sup>89</sup> Depictions of the family—especially several generations—exemplify how perestroika authors show *byt*'s effect on women's space and time. While works such as "Letom v gorode" also established parent-child relations as a crucial topic, post-1985

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<sup>88</sup> Tolstaia's "Ogon' i pyl'" and the works of Ulitskaia in the 1990s suggest a more optimistic role for discourse and its artistic representation of the quotidian.

<sup>89</sup> This initially paradoxical formulation brings to mind both the boundlessness prosaics ascribes to ordinary life and Trifonov's task for the writer: making the ephemeral enduring (1974, 194).

women's writing expands this analysis and finds more disturbing results—authors emphasize sexual violence, childbirth, and abortion as events distinguishing women's fate from men's. In the ironically titled "Gimn sem'e" (A Hymn to the Family), Alla's grandmother was impregnated by her mother's husband, who then, in typical Petrushevskaiian fashion, hanged himself (Petrushevskaiia 1998, 105-06). The story's structure, a series of numbered paragraphs, intensifies the narrator's cold account of family misfortunes: human tragedy becomes a string of figures. At times the generations are difficult to distinguish, as with the three Vasen'ki in Petrushevskaiia's story of the same name. Discussions of individual generations and the sum total of their interaction buttress the claim that Petrushevskaiia dismantles the family, which was one of Baranskaia's morally valorized constants (Katz 1998, 190). Repeated sins produce a generation *mise-en-abîme* more harmful than that of Grekova's Anfisa and Vadim.<sup>90</sup>

Here we see a different aspect of Lipovetskii's observations about the Oedipal myth in Petrushevskaiia's works. The specifics of the Theban tragedy are less important than its components: generations hobbled by earlier mistakes that lead to the revelation of private sins. In order to more dramatically display the results of transgression, Petrushevskaiia follows the precedent of Sophocles and creates situations better understood by her audience than her characters. This scenario is particularly effective when presented within the informal longitudinal studies that are her family chronicles. The older generation (more mothers than fathers, since the

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<sup>90</sup> *Vremia noch'* is the best example of doomed repetition in the families Petrushevskaiia portrays. The hypocritically self-righteous Anna Andrianovna gave birth to Alena after having sex with a man she never saw again, later losing her job because of an affair with a married supervisor (Petrushevskaiia 1998, 387). Alena has already repeated these missteps, and Tima and the other grandchildren will probably have similar fates.

latter are often absent) do not sense how actions influence their offspring. The initial decision to have children is no exception: the mother in *Svoi krug* suggests that her “reason” was the simple fact that without children one feels awkward (Petrushevskaiia 1998, 328). Such short-sightedness and the indulging of male children (e.g., Andrei in *Vremia noch'*) lead to family tragedies whereby Petrushevskaiia’s “[w]omen create the selfish monstrosities who devour them” (Woll 1993, 129). In this sense Valentina Solov'eva’s otherwise undistinguished story “U vsekh deti kak deti” (Everyone Has Normal Children) contains a moment of wisdom. Single mother Liudmila worries that constant rebukes may harm her daughter, a realization that could allow the girl to avoid the cycle of generational mistakes that gives Petrushevskaiia’s works their temporal claustrophobia (*Chisten'kaia zhizn'* 223; Dalton-Brown 185).<sup>91</sup>

Images of the family show that what molds temporality is not epic events (e.g. war and Holocaust in Grossman’s *Zhizn' i sud'ba*). Instead, “Novye Gamlety” (The New Hamlets) articulates what for Petrushevskaiia is an unusually straightforward hypothesis:

В чем проблема Гамлета—в том, вероятно, что порвалась связь времен. А что такое связь времен, как не связь отец-мать-ребенок? (Петрушевская 2000, 144)

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<sup>91</sup> Liudmila’s thought reflects the quiet moments of domestic epiphany that are part of Bakhtin’s theory of prosaic ethics (Morson and Emerson 26). These reassuring visions of everyday life, upheld as models for family happiness in Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina* and *Voina i mir*, are exceptions in women’s prose. In general authors such as Petrushevskaiia and Vasilenko choose the Dostoevskian rather than Tolstoyan model of the family, e.g., not the linear progression of generations in *Voina i mir* but the degenerative repetition of Dostoyevsky’s *Besy*.

Hamlet's problem was probably the severing of temporal connections. And what are temporal connections, if not the connection of father-mother-child?

Petrushevskaiia explicitly connects the individual's sense of time and space to family relations. In this sense it is not surprising that the chronotope of crisis in perestroika women's prose, expressed through large-scale catastrophe or discourse, often combines these with the family's peculiarly cyclic and ateleological time. What results is a domestication of history that will also shape Ulitskaia's writing.

The avoidance of goal-oriented temporality is distinct from that of works such as *Moskva-Petushki* due to this evasion accompanying attacks on traditional gender roles (e.g., Petrushevskaiia's bad mothers) and the domestic milieu that Venichka fears. Baranskaia's "week like any other" and Grekova's wandering ship of widows rejected linear time in a manner that successors intensified through striking metaphors (the endless darkness implied in *Vremia noch'*) commenting on both time and domestic space.<sup>92</sup>

Sometimes a work's location evinces ateleological time. The consequences of Shamara's rape shape a community based on the labor of the rapists and other convicts. While the protagonist remains in the city, the assault is re-enacted several times: first through the metaphor of the predacious personnel carriers, then by Ustin himself, who this time shouts commands in German (*Ne pomniashchaia zla* 100-01). In Petrushevskaiia's works it is the recurring threat of

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<sup>92</sup> Petrushevskaiia's use of the *sluchai* (incident) in her cycle *Pesni vostochnykh slavian* (Songs of the Eastern Slavs, 1990) is another example of ateleological time, recalling the disjointed temporality, black humor, and crushing *byt* of Daniil Kharms's absurdist min-stories (Petrushevskaiia 1990, 7). This, however, is an association the author vehemently denies (Dalton-Brown 93).

potential homelessness that shapes the narrative and robs time and space of other meaning. Characters (Alena, Sasha, Groznaia's relatives) live on the threshold in their search for metaphorical and literal housing, a liminal state Goscilo relates to Dostoyevsky (Ivanova 28, 32n).<sup>93</sup> This borderline existence, combined with familial crises, renders it almost impossible for characters to improve their lives. Critics responded differently to how perestroika-era women's prose challenged goal-oriented time: Gessen lauds their attack on the historical optimism of Soviet literature while Basinskii criticizes women's prose as ateleological (Gessen 1989, 176; Basinskii 10).

Women writers broadened the chronotope of crisis through their depiction of catastrophe on a collective level or the subordination of narrative action to discourse. Both tendencies challenge teleological temporality, as does a focus on families passing on poverty and hopelessness from generation to generation. The emphasis on the quotidian and details marking women's prose during Thaw and Stagnation became a vicious circle of inherited disasters, with Petrushevskaiia, Gorlanova, and others portraying how both individual female characters and women as a group suffer from these misfortunes.

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<sup>93</sup> The *kommunalka* also influences time: in "Mest'" (Revenge) Raia's retribution against jealous neighbor Zina shapes temporality and narrative (Petrushevskaiia 2002, 213). While Karla Hielscher reads this work as a Shakespearean story of guilt and innocence, she forgets the bard's ominous intersection of space and time in the doomed quotidian of Hamlet and others (1995, 352).

### 3.3. Reinventing Women's Prose: Problems of Definition and Association

Before the late 1980s authors' own perceptions and critics' assessments reiterated Barbara Heldt's view of women writers in the nineteenth century: while individual works by women authors existed, these writers did not comprise a distinct category (Heldt 1987, 2). In 1991 Irina Sliusareva equivocated by contending that, while women can and do write, to insist on a separate women's literature invites hostile generalizations from critics (238). This argument asserted the existence of women's writing based on the very fact that critics debated its status and merits. Such recognition plus reservation dominated critical assessment of the newly visible female authors appearing in six collections published between 1989 and 1991. These anthologies shared previously suspect or taboo themes such as infidelity, abortion, violence, poverty, rape, prostitution, ecological disaster, and male and female alcoholism. Common content and increased critical attention by Dark, Natal'ia Ivanova, and others constituted a reinvention of women's prose after decades of writers such as Vera Panova, who subordinated women's issues to a vision of women as "female Soviets."

Why did women's writing only expand and gain prominence during perestroika? First, Baranskaia and Grekova in the 1960s-80s provided a precedent for focusing on women's concerns in mainstream writing. Literary history provides another answer. Russian women's writing is marked by alienation and no sense of a stable identity: *glasnost'* women authors did not assume that previous female writers might be awaiting rediscovery (Marsh 1996, 2-4; Kelly 1994, 68). This supposition posits a lack of tradition that, according to Elaine Showalter, makes women's writing derivative in the eyes of critics and the authors themselves—it is a perpetual newcomer and must constantly reinvent its identity (11-12).

Natal'ia Perova names time as a simple reason why more women had not written for publication or “the drawer” and thus could not be published during the late 1980s (Perova interview 2003). Raunio gives the reader a more specific and *byt*-oriented picture in “Как ia ne stala pisatel'nitsei” (How I Didn't Become a Writer):

Работа, семья, ведение хозяйства, муж-поэт, которому надо «создавать условия» в тесноте единственной комнатки с печным отоплением (говорят, кто-то умудряется писать в ванной или туалете, о кухне уж не говорю—ничего этого у нас не было). Потом дети, учеба мужа в университете, развод и растянувшаяся на годы болезнь матери, которая умирала долго и мучительно дома, на моих руках. Кому незнакомы эти картины? (*Мария* 1990, 269)

Work, family, keeping house, a poet husband who needs to have the “right environment” created for him in the crowded space of our small single room heated by the stove (they say that some people manage to write in the bathroom; I am not going to talk about the kitchen, since we didn't have such a thing). Then children, my husband's university studies, divorce and my mother's illness, which lasted for years as she died slowly and painfully before my eyes. Who is not familiar with these scenes?

This grim description combines the accrual of facts motivating the documentary rhetoric of Baranskaia and Grekova and the crushing poverty Anna Andrianovna bemoans. By making

writing dependent on a specifically female *byt* Raunio undermines a crucial myth of the Russian intelligentsia: genius triumphs over difficult material circumstances.<sup>94</sup>

The reinvention of women's prose occurred during a period of polarized change. Two opposing tendencies marked the overall gender climate of 1985-91: critique of traditional roles by some academics on the one hand, and, on the other, the reinforcement of these very same identities by state and economic causes. Several factors in Russian academe questioned perceptions of masculinity and femininity: surveys dealing with marriage and sexuality; increased numbers of articles relating to women's issues; the 1990 creation of the Moscow Center for Gender Studies; the publication of past and recent women's literature; media coverage of feminists such as Ol'ga Lipovskaia; and the appearance of a small number of women's and feminist organizations (Goscilo 1996a, 12; *Gendernye issledovaniia v Rossii* viii).<sup>95</sup> These developments had less of an impact outside Moscow and Leningrad/St. Petersburg, although the Naberezhnye Chelny organization *Femina* remains one of several active provincial women's groups established during perestroika (Henderson 249-51).

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<sup>94</sup> Scientist and poet Mikhail Lomonosov walking to Moscow to study is one such legend, while Anna Akhmatova composing "Requiem" outside a Leningrad prison is another. Such accounts portray *bytie* triumphing over *byt*, a reaffirmation of the immaterial's superiority to *telesnost'* and the world of objects.

<sup>95</sup> In 1988 Lipovskaia began publishing *Zhenskoe chtenie* (Women's Reading), a periodical with articles by Russian feminists and translations of prominent Westerners such as Adrienne Rich. Despite its modest typescript format, this publication, later associated with the St. Petersburg Center for Gender Issues, was more influential than Tat'iana Mamonova's earlier effort. In addition to *Zhenskoe chtenie*, the journal *Preobrazhenie* (Transfiguration) appeared in 1993.



Nadezhda Azhgikhina identifies an opposite tendency partially rooted in Gorbachev's observation that society "should liberate women and give them the chance to stay at home" (Azhgikhina 2000, 60). Whether intended as edict or suggestion, this formulation emboldened those such as Tarkhova and critic Natal'ia Startseva, who subscribed to an essentialist interpretation of female roles (Azhgikhina interview 2003; Startseva 4). Perestroika's dramatic cultural changes precipitated a search for a stabilizing constant, which many Russians harnessed to a conservative interpretation of "proper" gender roles (Klimenkova 156-57).

Perestroika's new freedom of the press also permitted dramatically increased sexual exploitation of women's bodies in advertising and pornography (Goscilo 1996a, 13-15). Publicizing prostitution, the USSR's first beauty pageants, and photo models rendered Grekova's earnest scientists invisible as readers reoriented their image of women: previously seen as full (if flawed) participants in society, women in the late 1980s became linked to a small number of roles (prostitute, mother, pin-up star, and so forth) (Azhgikhina 2000, 60-61).

In this polarized context three principal literary trends shaped the reinvention of women's prose. First, this analysis must qualify the influence of *byt* prose: while female authors' main concerns came from Trifonov, Baranskaia, and Grekova (e.g., overcrowded housing, the double burden, problematic marriages), the almanac *Mariia* (1990) emphasized a strong affinity with the more traditional country writers.<sup>96</sup> The 1980s trend—*drugaiia* (or *novaia*) *proza* (different or new

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<sup>96</sup> Little research has been done on this connection. See Goscilo's "Coming a Long Way, Baby: A Quarter-Century of Russian Women's Fiction" (8-9). In great part this oversight is due to Moscow/St. Petersburg publishers and journals assuming provincial writers to be both marginal and second-rate. Women writers face the additional burden of sexism, as Tat'iana Meshko observes in *Mariia* (1990).

prose)—was a second influence on both female authors and critics' perceptions (Dark 1990, 223). Petrushevskaiia and Tolstaia were among the most visible writers of *drugaiia proza*, a catch-all term applied to innovative fiction distinguishing itself from the legacies of socialist realism as well as city and country prose. *Drugaiia proza*'s lack of pathos and its distance from verisimilitude marked 1980s literature in several ways. The fiction of this era refused to honor stereotypes created by previous authors, challenged the hypocritical standards of Soviet morality, and pursued stylistic innovation (Dark 1990, 223; Rovenskaia 2002, 292). Critics later applied these attributes to women's prose through the age-old principle of guilt by association. Denying the ties between women's prose and realism, however, dehistoricizes its development, particularly the earlier documentary impulse of Baranskaia and Grekova, which helped legitimate women's issues.

The third factor is the six collections of women's prose, poetry, drama, and non-fiction published between 1989 and 1991: *Zhenskaia logika* (Women's Logic, 1989), *Mariia* (first volume, 1990), *Ne pomniashchaia zla* (She Who Remembers No Evil, 1990), *Chisten'kaia zhizn'* (A Clean Little Life, 1990), *Novye amazonki* (The New Amazons, 1991), and *Abstinentki* (The Abstinent, 1991).<sup>97</sup> The idea to publish such untraditional prose in the form of anthologies may have derived from the 1970s *samizdat* tradition, which had produced Mamonova's edited anthology (Rovenskaia 2002, 293).

These collections directly or indirectly critique one another. Vasilenko, a main organizer of the more feminist *Ne pomniashchaia zla* and *Novye amazonki*, accused *Zhenskaia logika* and *Chisten'kaia zhizn'* of being published without any rationale, viz., not employing women's prose

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<sup>97</sup> Chapter Four discusses the several collections that appeared from 1992 to 2001, including the second volume of *Mariia* (1995).

as an organizing principle (2001, 86). *Mariia*'s compilers claimed that it was the first almanac of women's prose, without mentioning *Zhenshchina i Rossiia*, *Zhenskaia logika*, or the two other collections published in 1990 (*Mariia* 1990, 5). This solipsism may simply reflect the disrupted communication between Moscow/Leningrad and the provinces, a situation that worsened during and after perestroika because of economic decline.<sup>98</sup>

Perestroika women authors added a sense of alterity to their predecessors' documentation. Vasilenko, Vasil'eva, and to a lesser extent Savkina differentiate women's writing from the (male) literary tradition. The editors of *Novye amazonki* make this divergence explicit: "For reasons connected to the irregular life in the field of combat, the Amazon did not come out from under Gogol's *Overcoat*. Everyone else did, but she did not" (4). Revising Dostoyevsky's formulation about the Gogolian roots of modern Russian literature, they reject an

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<sup>98</sup> These anthologies have several genesis stories. A 1989 women's literary meeting in Karelia eventually produced *Mariia* (1990, 1995), the collections *Zhena, kotoraiia umela letat'* (The Wife Who Could Fly, 1993) and *Russkaia dusha* (Russian Soul, 1995), as well as the local television show *Komnata dlia sestry Shekspira* (A Room for Shakespeare's Sister, 1992) (Savkina 1998, 72). Vasilenko ascribes the creation of *Ne pomniashchaia zla* and *Novye amazonki* to a 1988 meeting with Vasil'eva, at which both authors realized that women were being increasingly excluded from the literary world (Vasilenko 2001, 80-82). In 1989 Vasil'eva created the short-lived *Federatsiia pisatel'nits* (Federation of Women Writers) as part of the state Writers Union, opening her organization's first event by asking why women, making up more than half the world's population, are absent in art (Vasil'eva 1989b, 7).

“alien” past while implying the importance of this same disdained legacy. Literary tradition legitimates its opponents, who gain stature by association through opposition.<sup>99</sup>

These authors identify themselves through gender or react to others’ identifications, suggesting that women’s anthologies are a collective identity, “a ‘summative’ [*summarnaia*] personality on the path towards forming its own cultural tradition” (Rovenskaia 1999, 215). The collections stimulated intense debate over the existence and attributes of women’s writing, which was judged as a presumably unified whole. Savkina woefully summarizes the general critical response:

Все критические статьи начинаются по-разному... кроме тех, что посвящены женской литературе. Последнее, как правило, открываются размышлениями, достойно ли делить литературу по половому признаку, существует ли вообще пресловутая женская проза. (*Жена, которая умела летать* 389)

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<sup>99</sup> Sometimes these authors focus on the self-reflexive subject of women’s experiences in literature. While Raunio offers a Russian version of Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own*, Meshko’s “Grafomanka iz provintsii” (Graphomaniac from the Provinces) describes a writer who is nearly raped while visiting Moscow (*Mariia* 1990, 209). The would-be rapist editor, who praises country prose, conflates the woman’s presumed inability to write with her status as sex object (*Mariia* 1990, 199). Gorlanova’s “Protokol” (The Minutes) records the thoughts of male writers as they decide not to publish an author who did not sleep with enough of them (*Abstinentki* 6).

All critical articles begin in different ways... except those devoted to women's literature. The latter, as a rule, open by considering whether it is worthwhile to divide literature by sex, whether this notorious women's prose actually exists.

Both Rovenskaia and Elena Trofimova, following Sliusareva, make the basic but convincing argument that the extensive controversy over the existence and characteristics of women's prose asserts that there is such a body of fiction (Rovenskaia 2002, 291; Trofimova 2002, 1).

Labeling this writing is problematic. Rovenskaia makes the reasonable point that the term "*zhenskaia proza*" (women's prose) must be used since it is the most common designator and was often employed by the collection contributors themselves (2002, 293).<sup>100</sup> I view women's prose as writing by women, who often (but not always) focus on female lives differing from men's in great part because of gendered inequality.

Basinskii is one of the few opponents of women's prose to devote substantial thought to its alleged characteristics, attacking *zhenskaia proza* as both esoteric and, as noted above, ateleological (10). He thus identifies women's writing as a distinct trend that, like *drugaiia proza*, tries to distance itself from Russian literary tradition. Vasilenko follows Basinskii's underlying logic when she describes how *Novye amazonki* deliberately donned the mantle of female otherness (Vasilenko 2001, 81). For Basinskii this was a self-deluding publicity stunt, whereas Vasilenko saw the move as the creation of a new literary identity. Indeed, ascribing alterity to women's writing is a key distinction between perestroika authors (who recognized and often

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<sup>100</sup> Gabrielian, publishing the first theoretical article on this subject in a major journal, argues that women's prose includes any work written by a woman, a formulation Trofimova echoes (Gabrielian 1996, 31; Trofimova 2002, 1). This seemingly obvious statement posits a set of common styles, themes, and attitudes—critics did not make such an assumption before 1987.

asserted their otherness) and Baranskaia and Grekova (who sensed their alien status but attempted to minimize it).

While Vasilenko associates women's prose with literary and gendered alterity, *zhenskaia proza* strongly reflected the obsessive documentation of Baranskaia and Grekova filtered through perestroika's proclivity for systematic critique. *Mariia's* introduction connects literature, policymaking, and women's survival, implying that women's writing must be first and foremost a reflection of life and its problems (1990, 5). These sentiments form a basic tenet of women's prose: literature should be a venue for expressing collective female experience.<sup>101</sup> This axiom in turn owes a great deal to Baranskaia and Grekova, who established a precedent for selective verisimilar documentation of female everyday lives.

During perestroika critics shared this conception of literature as essentially mimetic, which partially explains their hostility to the more fantastic or extreme depictions in women's prose: the authors unduly emphasized the purportedly anomalous grimness of women's lives. As during Thaw and Stagnation, opponents and supporters of women's prose stressed its relation to typicality and defined this concept in contradictory ways. When critics attack *Shamara's* abortion scene or accuse Petrushevskaiia of privileging the physiological at the expense of believability, they imply that literature reflects how reality should be (i.e., transformative typicality) (Basinskii 10; Shcheglova 23). Others, however, argue for typicality being what actually exists (i.e., reflective): verisimilitude may justifiably employ *chernukha* if this is the present state of reality (Kuralekh 67; Remizova 4).

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<sup>101</sup> Glinka concisely links women's lives and the written word when describing the difficulty of finding a publisher for her story: "My whole life has been crushed and nobody wants to listen" (qtd. in Perova interview 2003).

In women's prose the typical comprises either what is often present (lines in *Kafedra* and *Nedelia kak nedelia*) or an extreme situation metonymically conveying a truth of everyday life (Sima's fate indicates neglect of the elderly). *Chernukha* combines these two tendencies.<sup>102</sup> *Chernukha*, as Lipovetskii suggests, derives from a journalistic approach to literature: the depiction of a reality that is extreme yet contains recognizable types from *byt* (the abused prostitute, impoverished mother, and so forth) (2002, 60-62, 70). *Chernukha* combines Baranskaia's and Grekova's legitimation of women as an integrated part of Soviet society with Petrushevskaiia's shocking depictions of the violence and hopelessness comprising the reality of this "typical" group of the population. Women authors' redefinition of typicality as reflective appropriates this maxim of realism as a means to critique gendered inequality.

Perestroika-era critics also attacked the neutrality of women's prose, recalling the Orthodox division of the world into the moral and immoral (with any middle ground vulnerable to the latter) (Hutchings 38). From this standpoint Petrushevskaiia and the newer writers wielded "merciless neutrality" (Ovenasian 1992, 249). Such perceived coldness is symptomatic of *drugaiia proza* as a whole, which has allegedly lost its connection with the Russian people and will end in tragedy (Ovenasian 1991, 23). E. Ovenasian implies that literature is either for or against imparting morality through representation: conservative critics assume that literature must reflect what should be (or provide an alternative to what should *not* be). Abhorrence of

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<sup>102</sup> Vladimir Rozanov's attack on the dead dogs depicted in Grekova's *Na ipystaniikh* assumes that these descriptions are exceptional and thus have no place in a literature devoted to typicality in its Lukácean meaning (Rozanov 295). The esthetic of *chernukha* nullifies his argument, arguing that the "ugly truth" is both shocking yet mundane in a period of declining wages and social unrest.

neutrality suggests religious binarism, the lingering Lukácsian socialist-realist esthetic, and the partisan split between conservative and liberal writers in the late 1980s.

Some of these accusations were also leveled at non-traditional male writers such as Viktor Erofeev (Ovenasian 1991, 23). What distinguishes reception of women's prose is the critics' emphasis on gender *qua* gender—this response is unsurprising given the collision of specifically women's collections and the more conservative gender roles that Vasil'eva, Goscilo, and Tat'iana Klimenkova observe during perestroika. Before 1985 almost all critics discussed women authors through *byt* which, as Chapter Two notes, was coded as a female and trivial realm. Vladimir Bondarenko shows that this pattern is still operative when he makes the bizarre accusation that Petrushevskaia's plays rely on the "cozy" world of women's *byt* (181). Bondarenko's phrase is clearly inaccurate; he cannot escape from the Thaw and Stagnation cliché of linking women to the quotidian's crass materiality. Basinskii, however, epitomizes the new critique of gender *per se* when he speculates whether the idea of a woman's soul was a trick invented by male writers (10).

Supporters of women's prose also use the explicit rhetoric of gender but with predictably different results. Rovenskaia proposes that gender is the defining characteristic of *zhenskaia proza*, echoing Rita Felski's assertion that documenting the female everyday in literature furthers democracy (Rovenskaia 2002, 301; Felski 162). Her assessment reiterates the introductions to *Mariia*, *Ne pomniashchaia zla*, and *Novye amazonki*: female *byt* shapes women's prose as a distinct reality.<sup>103</sup> Baranskaia's and Grekova's documentation of individual women's quotidian

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<sup>103</sup> Niusia Mil'man reinforces this assertion, describing *zhenskaia proza* as rooted less in literature than in social awareness: women's daily lives dictate women's writing (53). However,



was replaced by a literature encompassing a collective vision of women's *byt*, which Rovenskaia labels a "summative personality": the abortion clinic, food line, and communal apartment are features so familiar that they merge the individual lives and temporal depictions of those experiencing them.

From 1985 to 1991 women's prose reemerged against a backdrop of tentative academic feminism and a broader conservative approach delimiting women's functions in society (i.e., prostitute or homemaker). The combined influences of *byt* prose, *drugaiia proza*, and the appearance of six literary anthologies gave women authors what both opponents and critics saw as distinct styles and themes. As during Thaw and Stagnation, critics debated the role of typicality in these works, with this concern existing alongside problems of neutrality and *chernukha*.

The political and economic turmoil of perestroika made *byt* a synonym for crisis and permitted frank discussion of the Soviet quotidian. Female authors appropriated the era's emphasis on exposure, negation, and systematic critique to question gender roles in a manner unthinkable to earlier generations. These queries helped produce the women's collections, which, in turn, reinvented women's prose as an identifiable trend in literature. While previous authors and critics used everyday life as a proxy for open discussions of women's issues, both supporters and opponents of this literature now addressed such problems directly.

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Petrushevskaiia, like Baranskaia and Grekova, shows how depicting morality colors representation.

#### 4. Post-Soviet Women's Prose: The Artistry of Everyday Life

##### 4.1. Transhistorical Time: Family and Woman as Temporality

During 1985-91 women's prose became a visible trend, accompanied by a hesitant academic discussion of feminism that coexisted and contrasted with a widespread endorsement of conservative gender roles in culture, politics, and the economy. Female authors, in particular Liudmila Petrushevskaja, exploited the era's tendency towards negation and exposure to illuminate previously taboo areas of male and female private life, demythologizing the intelligentsia in the process. Focusing on six literary anthologies, critics debated the role of typicality and the putative characteristics of women's prose. While before perestroika authors and critics invoked *byt* as a coded reference to women's issues, during the last years of the Soviet Union supporters and opponents explicitly invoked gender as a criterion to laud or denigrate women's writing.

From 1992 to 2001 women's prose and literature as a whole changed dramatically. The economic and cultural shifts accompanying the end of the USSR (1991) marginalized high culture and the role of the intelligentsia. In novels such as *Medeia i ee deti* (Medea and Her Children, 1996) and *Durochka* Liudmila Ulitskaia and Svetlana Vasilenko employed what I term transhistorical time, a temporality distinct from the chronotope of crisis dominating the works of women writers during the Thaw, Stagnation, and perestroika. This change paralleled a less rigid approach to depiction of homosexual and heterosexual gender roles, roles authors grounded more in emotion and experience than in the biological destiny of stoic widows (Baranskaia) or profligate husbands (Petrushevskaja). Depictions by authors appearing in four post-Soviet women's collections indicate that this trend accompanied more familiar images of men as

predators. Critics debated the relationship between women's prose and feminism as well as its place in the new divide between high (elite) and low (popular) culture. Ulitskaia's depictions of *byt* after 1991 imagined the quotidian as an arena for opportunity rather than as an obstacle. Such treatment posits reader awareness of the everyday problems first cautiously documented by Baranskaia and Grekova, then scrutinized by Petrushevskaiia and Soviet women's anthologies.

Ulitskaia and Vasilenko are two of the era's most original authors in terms of woman-centered themes. Such innovation in great part derives from imagining women's temporality as transhistorical time: families based on primarily emotional or spiritual ties suggest that female experiences bridge various chronological eras. Their portrayal of how the family shapes temporality allows for an indirect critique of history, where the narrative examines key events through the lens of the female quotidian. Such assessment is broader and more explicit than in earlier works (e.g., Grekova's oblique references to Stalinism in "Letom v gorode" and *Khoziaika gostinitsy*).

Ulitskaia's *Medeia i ee deti* sharply diverges from the type of temporal and psychological account of the family given in Petrushevskaiia's *Vremia noch'*, where Anna Andrianovna's relatives suffer through a cycle of unlearned mistakes. The ironically named Medeia shows that love is a different kind of continuity: her selflessness and kindness propel the narrative from its description of Stalinism to the post-Soviet era. Following the image of the widow-mothers in Baranskaia's *Den' pominoveniia* and Grekova's *Vdovii parokhod*, the narrative presents love as more familial than sexual. Medeia never has sex after her husband dies, making her appear to adhere to the unwritten code for Russian widows (Ulitskaia 2002c, 5-6; Goscilo 1995a, 30). The narrator implies, however, that this chastity results from lack of opportunity instead of a conscious choice to remain faithful to the deceased (Ulitskaia 2002c, 78). The author

successfully creates a model of a well-lived life by presenting the protagonist as a character in whom human weaknesses combine with saintly virtues (kindness, patience, and so forth).

Medeia as a mother lacks the sadomasochistic overtones of Petrushevskaja's maternal figures. Instead, she is a bulwark of family solidarity against such common foes as Stalinism and poverty. While *Vremia noch'* ends with an empty apartment signifying existential loneliness and abandonment, *Medeia i ee deti* concludes by evoking mutual support and endurance:

Это удивительно приятное чувство—принадлежать к семье Медеи, к такой большой семье, что всех ее членов даже не знаешь в лицо и они теряются в перспективе бывшего, не бывшего и будущего (Улицкая 2002с, 253)

It is a surprisingly pleasant feeling to belong to Medeia's family, a family that is so large that one cannot recognize all its members as they recede into the depths of that which is, was, and will be.

The open-ended final paragraph portrays a group united by feeling rather than blood. While relatives may not recognize one another, they share a common belonging that emanates from Medeia as a centripetal force (as opposed to Anna Andrianovna, whose ultimate influence is centrifugal). Medeia's relatives are the evolution of the reconstituted family Alexander Prokhorov observes in Thaw culture: her kin may not be biologically related but they associate out of desire instead of necessity (215).

In the concluding paragraph of *Medeia i ee deti* temporality reveals its role in the novel as a whole: the family mediates between what Fernand Braudel terms the "short time span" and "*longue durée*." The short time span, an alternate to the overly narrow history of events, comes from everyday life—for Medeia this includes gardening, greeting relatives and neighbors, and so forth (Braudel 1980, 28). *Longue durée*, which Braudel measures in centuries, in Ulitskaia's

work refers to family uniting past and present: Medeia's legacy and that of her numerous kin will continue long after her Crimean home disappears (Braudel 1980, 27).

It is appropriate that the narrative unfolds in this ancient region, with its echoes of classical, pre-Kievan, and Russian history.<sup>104</sup> The temporal and geographical unity of such spatial references creates a chronotopic parallel to the stabilizing longevity of Medeia's clan, with both combining to create what Rovenskaia argues is a home that moves in time (Rovenskaia 2001a, 25).<sup>105</sup>

Familial centrality and continuity in the novel subsume political events (Alik's emigration to the United States, the death of Stalin) as the undercurrent of history. Leonid Bakhtov underestimates the family in *Medeia i ee deti*: kinship structures temporality despite the subjective narration and non-linear plot distinguishing the novel from nineteenth-century family chronicles (179). Without Medeia's active benevolence (grounded in the author's love of details) there would be no novel—this focus, jarringly absent in *Vremia noch'*, helps explain the latter work's more modest length.

Tat'iana Kazarina gives a more nuanced reading of the work: for Ulitskaia the family, particularly the strong connections of its Eastern or Jewish variant, is a powerful form of

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<sup>104</sup> Stressing Medeia's strong connection to the peninsula gives the novel a core that resembles and intensifies the role played by post-war central Moscow in other Ulitskaia works such as "Vtoroe marta togo zhe goda" (March 1953) and "Perlovyi sup" (Pearl Barley Soup). These stories share a common location and time, both of which are more compressed than those of *Medeia i ee deti*.

<sup>105</sup> Nina Sadur's play *Krasnyi paradiz* (Red Paradise, 1991), by contrast, makes the Crimea the site of repetitions that doom the characters to imprisonment within the past.

memory (171). While links between family and memory also guide time in *Vremia noch'* and *Vdovii parokhod*, these earlier works offer negative models of memory. Anna Andrianovna invents a version of the past based on maternal megalomania that is more delusional and self-serving than helpful for Alena and Andrei. Grekova's novel for its part is trapped within the widows' reconstituted family, where the pair past/loss casts a pall over the present and future—even Vadim's transformation reminds the reader of the price Anfisa paid to enact it. In Ulitskaia's novel neither motherhood nor the past constrains memory, which will expand and evolve with each member of the family. The incompleteness that results from such growth resembles the rejuvenation and flexibility Bakhtin lauds in the novel as a genre (1992, 27).

Vasilenko's Nad'ka-Ganna, the orphan protagonist of *Durochka*, shows that transhistorical temporality also takes shape around a family modeled on spiritual relations. Nad'ka-Ganna has a clear connection to Russian collective identity, beginning with the trope of the *narod*: she is breastfed by peasants instead of the mother lost during the artificial famines of the early 1930s (Vasilenko 2000, 16). The protagonist unites the work's two plotlines (Stalinism and the Cuban Missile Crisis), which depict her as a mother and comforter to both literal and metaphorical children, i.e., her fellow dekulakized orphans. The conclusion of *Durochka* envisions Nad'ka-Ganna as the Orthodox Mother of God. After dreaming of the Virgin Mary, she gives birth to the sun and stops the US nuclear strike—an act of intercession resembling the *Bogoroditsa*'s mercy (Vasilenko 2000, 105, 125-26).

Nad'ka-Ganna operates as the *longue durée* of Russian history by bridging the pre-Christian, Kievan, appanage, and Soviet periods.<sup>106</sup> What binds these eras together are the

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<sup>106</sup> Nad'ka-Ganna is also compared to both the Mongol princess giving the southern Akhtuba River its name and, less directly, to the pagan *mat' syra zemlia* (Mother Damp Earth) who

images of Nad'ka-Ganna as spiritual mother and the Russian people as God's children: they often err but are ultimately redeemed.<sup>107</sup>

It is not an accident that in Vasilenko's fictional world salvation comes from a maternal savior rather than a Christ figure. This change is a much more effective appropriation of Biblical legend than that in Nina Sadur's "Chervivyi synok": Nad'ka-Ganna creates instead of wishing to destroy, providing a matrilinear mythology that opposes the male-oriented history of great events (e.g., the brinkmanship of Kennedy and Khrushchev in the early 1960s).

*Durochka* conveys multilayered temporality through Nad'ka-Ganna's culturally overdetermined claims on several different historical traditions (pagan earth mother, Mother of God, Mongol princess). The presence of varying time periods within a single work evokes one of Nina Gabrielian's hopes for women's prose: its evolution beyond reaction to its male counterpart (1996, 71). The micro-time and cyclical plot of earlier works such as Baranskaia's *Nedelia kak nedelia* opposed the teleological diegesis of the socialist-realist production novel. However, the layered time in *Durochka* helps the narrative both continue Russian literature's age-old search for national identity and differentiates the plot structure from that of previous women authors. The family as transhistorical temporality separates Vasilenko and Ulitskaia from the small-scale

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influenced Russian culture's appropriation of the Virgin Mary (Vasilenko 2000, 73; Taiganova 188; Ivanits 15).

<sup>107</sup> The idea of the Russian people as tested by suffering dates from the Mongol period and reappears in figures such as Dostoyevsky's Sonia Marmeladova. Vasilenko's originality stems from linking this *idée fixe* to a maternal figure who saves through action (giving birth) instead of the passive suffering that Baranskaia ascribes to Russia as widow in *Den' pominoveniia*.

time of Grekova's and Baranskaia's harried heroines, and the flat "clock time" emphasizing the episodic failures of Galina Shcherbakova's Masha Peredreeva (Ricoeur 159).<sup>108</sup>

Depicting transhistorical time through the family, Vasilenko and Ulitskaia engage in what Jerome Beaty terms "history by indirection." Describing this practice in George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, he explains that the novel never "addresses historical information directly to the reader, preferring to introduce it as part of the everyday affairs of the fictional characters" (Beaty 706). *Durochka* and *Medeia i ee deti* combine quotidian hints at the past (the orphans' Black Maria game, Medeia's thoughts on the deported Crimean Tartars) with historical events embedded in important plot moments (Nad'ka-Ganna prevents the nuclear attack by giving birth to the sun).<sup>109</sup>

In Ulitskaia's *Kazus Kukotskogo* (The Kukotskii Case, 2001) indirect expression of history occurs through specifically female experience. Gynecologist Pavel Aleksandrovich Kukotskii and his support for decriminalizing abortion during Stalinism amplify the subtler connection in "Letom v gorode" between lack of reproductive freedom and loss of human rights:

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<sup>108</sup> Filtering multiple temporalities through a physically and culturally nomadic character reiterates a key Lukácsian goal for literature: the "urge to be at home everywhere" (1992, 29). Nad'ka-Ganna expresses this longing as orphan and mother, two roles united by lack or presence of family—kinship is both literal (Nad'ka-Ganna is adopted in the 1962 plot) and spiritual (Nad'ka-Ganna as Mother of God).

<sup>109</sup> For Anja Grothe, Medeia's life combines mythic elements with "a kind of parallel documentation to the [twentieth] century" (2000, 266). History and myth in the novel are complementary, reflecting the author's refusal to categorize and isolate modes of thought or ways of interpreting the past.



“And isn’t this the essential boundary between human and animal, the ability and right to go beyond the bounds of biological law and create progeny because of personal desire and not the will of natural rhythms?” (Ulitskaia 2002b, 165). This polemic highlights the link between abortion and Stalinist oppression that contaminates the doctor’s marriage with Elena and causes their daughter Tania to work for the would-be rapist Gansovskii (Ulitskaia 2002b, 284).<sup>110</sup>

Given Soviet censorship, it is no surprise that *Kazus Kukotskogo* addresses the connections between Stalinism and abortion more explicitly than does Grekova’s story of 1962. Ulitskaia’s narrator notes the bitter irony of Khrushchev’s decriminalization decision, which allowed women to take the lives of their unborn children just as the state itself from the 1930s-1950s had slaughtered the living (2002b, 140). Such interactions between government and women validate Iuliia Gradskaia’s assertion that female citizens experienced state control over their bodies in everyday life (92). Ulitskaia’s history by indirection ties changes in abortion policies to a state concerned more with demographics than personal freedom or quality of life.

Traktorina Petrovna, the head of the orphanage in *Durochka*, is a more obvious symbol of history filtered through female experience. The director, whose laughable first name places her as born during the 1920s, has a patronymic evoking the common people. Given Nad’ka-Ganna’s relation to Christian and pre-Christian Russian traditional culture, her own religious double name

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<sup>110</sup> The presence of a male protagonist who takes life (instead of preserving it) distinguishes *Kazus Kukotskogo* from works such as Natal’ia Sukhanova’s pro-natalist “Delos” in *Chisten’kaia zhizn’*. Ulitskaia’s novel asserts that Pavel Aleksandrovich aids those already born by helping women to choose when to have children. Such a function separates female gender roles (Pavel Aleksandrovich as comforter and healer) from female biology (Baranskaia’s mothers as the apotheosis of femininity).

(“Hope” and the Biblical Hannah) opposes Traktorina Petrovna’s. Their physical form reiterates this dissimilarity: while the girl is small and malnourished as a result of collectivization and her wanderings as a holy fool, Traktorina Petrovna typifies the Stalinist body—a corporeal presence that is large, masculine, and crushes challengers (Hellebust 93-96; Gillespie 5). If Nad’ka-Ganna’s double name and subsequent fate confirm her symbolic status as woman, Traktorina Petrovna is the belligerent masculinized force that Vasilenko believes may destroy the world (2001, 89).<sup>111</sup>

By the 1990s the Stalinist authority figure was a recognizable villain, allowing Vasilenko to rely on reader reactions not available to Grekova: “Letom v gorode” has no stand-in for the state, and even the scathing *Svezho predanie* lacks a central negative character. Traktorina Petrovna parallels Nad’ka-Ganna as a transhistorical and mythically evil figure—she survives destalinization and continues to deform the younger generation. This longevity both implies that the totalitarian impulse continued after 1953 and recalls such unnaturally old folkloric villains as Baba-Iaga.<sup>112</sup> While the Mother of God symbolizes a tradition that may save the Russian people,

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<sup>111</sup> Traktorina Petrovna has another opposite: the earthy Tetia Kharyta, who is deeply religious, humane, and thus inevitably destroyed by the Stalinist juggernaut and its human personification. Tetia Kharyta was based on one of Vasilenko’s relatives who was killed by the Nazis—the fictional transposition of German occupier and Stalinist personalizes earlier comparisons in *Svezho predanie* and Grossman’s *Zhizn’ i sud’ba* (Vasilenko 1995, 188).

<sup>112</sup> Sadur’s *Nemets* (The German) gives a less historicized folkloric image than that of Traktorina Petrovna. Aleksandra Nikolaevna reenacts the plot of the fairy tale “Finist iasnyi sokol” (Finist the Bright Falcon) while pursuing her German lover—however, Sadur’s work is concerned with

the director personifies a monolithic power structure that is pushing humanity towards disaster (collectivization, the Cuban Missile Crisis).

Historical pessimism in *Durochka* is less overwhelming than in certain other women's works. *Svezho predanie*'s cycle of death and suffering shows that anti-Semitism is a basic part of Russian culture, prophetically foreseeing its survival beyond both Stalin and the USSR. *Durochka* provides a treatment of history that is broader in scope and more optimistic. The opposition Nad'ka-Ganna/Traktorina Petrovna indicates the comforting Christian idea of redemption through struggle and suffering, a concept the novel's conclusion upholds. The messianic/Marianite image of Nad'ka-Ganna giving birth to the sun tempers the horror of Russian history.

Transhistorical time shaped by women and families broadens the scope of *Durochka*, *Medeia i ee deti*, and *Kazus Kukotskogo*. While the chronotope of crisis encloses the reader within a specific situation (the harrowing visit to Sima in *Vremia noch'*), Ulitskaia and Vasilenko allow the narrative to expand outward, much like the multitudinous members of Medeia's family.

The shift from a chronotope of crisis to an emphasis on transhistorical time comes from the importance of the family as an emotional or spiritual as well as biological group. Temporality interweaving various historical eras links the short time span and *longue durée* conceptualized by Braudel through a network of kinship that sometimes assumes a metaphorical status (e.g., Russia as spiritual family). Through history (Ulitskaia) and folklore (Vasilenko) the authors employ a broad temporal scope to indirectly assess history, connecting political events to changes in the comparison of national character (Russian versus German) instead of focusing on Russian identity (*Russian Fairy Tales* 580-88).

protagonists' lives. The range of time in *Durochka*, *Medeia i ee deti*, and *Kazus Kukotskogo* sometimes suggests epic range but with specifically female experience grounding the works through everyday life.

#### **4.2. Gender: Diffuse Description and Diversified Roles**

Ulitskaia's and Vasilenko's use of transhistorical temporality and history by indirection promotes a subtle engagement with those political events shaping female lives in the twentieth century. Post-Soviet female authors also depict more nuanced and diverse roles for women, with Ulitskaia in particular conveying them through diffuse and original portrayals that avoid cliché and the shrill descriptions of her perestroika predecessors (e.g., Polina Slutskina). In a significant departure from Petrushevskiaia, women's sexual experiences in Ulitskaia's and Ol'ga Lobova's works resemble exploration more than exploitation (especially for young women). Destabilizing the equation between sexuality and transgression has other results: Ulitskaia normalizes homosexuality instead of linking it to disaster. However, Vasilenko and Ulitskaia also provide two recurring character types—the female saint and the disabled woman—who resemble previous, more traditional personages in women's writing.

For Ulitskaia the erotic is a network of choices furthering individual development. Discussing Sandra's sexuality in *Medeia i ee deti*, the narrator filters observations through diction and syntax stressing the stylistics of representation more than the content itself. Sandra etymologically and experientially opposes her sister Medeia, whose name (“Medea”) ironically

links her to one of Greek mythology's more vengeful wives.<sup>113</sup> The novel contrasts the women's lives and in particular Medeia's more modest fortunes with men, for which Sandra is partially to blame:

Но Медея догадывалась, что ее младшая сестренка не пренебрегает никакими радостями, ловит свои жемчужины в любой воде и собирает медок со всех цветов (Улицкая 2002b, 78)

But Medeia guessed that her little sister did not scorn any pleasures, found her pearls in any sea, and gathered her nectar from any and all flowers.

The narrator gives Sandra a role usually reserved for the (older) male in Russian literature: the connoisseur of varying pleasures. The verb *prenebreat'* (to scorn, disregard), which is too formal for the diminutive *sestrenka* (little sister), creates the disparity between content and expression that continues in the various metaphors for Sandra's erotic escapades.<sup>114</sup>

The result is a humorous and refined description that is quite different from most women writers' previous descriptions of sexuality.<sup>115</sup> Baranskaia and Grekova avoid the topic, with the

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<sup>113</sup> "Sandra" is a form of Alexandra, which is the female equivalent of Alexander (meaning "defender of men"). For Westerners and Russians this name suggests conquest and culture: the city of Alexandria, Alexander the Great, Tsar Alexander I, and so forth.

<sup>114</sup> This light-hearted discussion of sexuality also obscures the fact that Sandra's erotic adventures included Medeia's husband. After discovering the affair, Medeia, in contrast to her dramaturgical counterpart, chooses incomprehension and silence instead of revenge (Ulitskaia 2002b, 164).

<sup>115</sup> Marina Palei's *Kabiria s Obvodnogo kanala* (Cabiria from the Bypass, 1991) is a notable exception as it relishes in the multifaceted sexual adventures of the precocious Mon'ka. Another

exception of the stranger in “Vstrecha” who overwhelms with his masculine prowess (Baranskaia 1993, 39-41). Petrushevskaiia’s narrators describe the erotic through malicious gossip (“Ioko Ono”) or provide voyeuristic descriptions emphasizing physicality (*Svoi krug*) instead of Ulitskaia’s system of metaphors.<sup>116</sup> Poring over Alena’s diary, Anna Andrianovna in *Vremia noch’* reads how her daughter lost her virginity to Sasha:

Он лез в кровавое месиво, в локутья, как насосом качал мою кровь, солома подо мной была мокрая, я пищала вроде резиновой игрушки с дырочкой в боку, я думала, что он все проповобовал за одну ночь, о чем читал и слышал в общежитии от других (Петрушевская 1998, 362)

He crawled into the bloody mess, into the shreds, and pumped my blood, the straw under me was wet, I was squeaking like some rubber toy with a hole in the side, I thought that he had tried everything in one night that he had read or heard about from the other guys in the dorm.

The agency enriching Sandra is gone, as are the more sophisticated images of Ulitskaia’s prose. Instead, there is an emphasis on the female as passivity/loss (blood, shreds, a hole) and the male as action/destruction (Sasha wounds her, crawls, pumps). Alena is the site of his experimentation, giving him knowledge he shares with other men but that excludes her. The

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Palei story, *Otdel propavshchikhsia*, however, treats the erotic as a biological phenomenon inseparable from the abortion ward and other possible consequences.

<sup>116</sup> Petrushevskaiia’s post-Soviet fictional works, however, diversify treatment of sexuality. While a story such as “Vasen’ki” (1995) links the erotic to physiology, the autobiographical “Nezrelye iagody kryzhovnika” (Ripening Gooseberries, 1999) subordinates it to the female protagonist’s growing sense of independence (Petrushevskaiia 1995 7; Petrushevskaiia 2000, 20).

overall tone of Alena's disgust is magnified by the surroundings: a barn for storing straw on the collective farm where the two are helping with the harvest. While Sandra's sexual activity makes her both satisfied and more mature, Alena becomes what Sally Dalton-Brown terms the Petrushevskaiian "human animal": a victim of primitive passions (vii).

Ulitskaia's "Vetrianaia ospa" (Chicken Pox) presents another quietly radical depiction of female sexuality as teenage Plishkina shows her friend Chelysheva how to masturbate (Ulitskaia 2002a, 193-94). Such an unconventional scene is defused through framing it as part of the girls' wedding game (i.e., the traditional heterosexual initiation of women).<sup>117</sup> The narrator also emphasizes that both girls were aware of this source of pleasure, but each thought their knowledge unique: "[Chelysheva] knew about that trick herself. What she did not know is that others knew about it, too" (2002a, 194). The passage exemplifies what Goscilo terms Ulitskaia's "low-key acceptance of the body, its drives and functions" (1996b, 6). As with the description of Sandra, linguistic innovation (teenage slang and colloquialism) palliates content.

In depicting this marginal aspect of sexuality Ulitskaia breaks with a series of traditions in women's prose. Plishkina and Chelysheva show that masturbation is pleasurable, which

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<sup>117</sup> Adrienne Rich's formulation of female same-sex relations helps to theorize such an ambiguous interaction. For Rich, Plishkina and Chelysheva's game would be a part of the "lesbian continuum": "a range—through each woman's life and throughout history—of woman-identified experience, not simply the fact that a woman has had or consciously denied genital experience with another woman" (135). The continuum, moving away from lesbianism as limited to either sexuality in general or genital contact in particular, is productive for reading the activities of Ulitskaia's female characters. No critic has yet investigated possible lesbian motifs in the author's works.

contrasts with the pain and blood Alena associates with intercourse. The girls' game implies that female sexuality may be autonomous from procreation, a thought beyond the ken of Baranskaia's mothers and obliquely condemned as disastrous by the fate of Gulia in Petrushevskaiia's "Muzyka ada."<sup>118</sup> As Petrushevskaiia's stories and the post-Soviet works of Viktoriia Tokareva imply, same-sex relations between men or women are "unnatural" at best, an attitude exemplified by the embittered lesbian Barbara in Tokareva's "Lilovyi kostium" (A Violet Suit) or Andrei in *Vremia noch'* (Tokareva 2002, 34-36).<sup>119</sup>

Describing female sexuality as a form of personal growth distinguishes Ulitskaia from authors such as Marina Karpova, whose "Lovlia maiskikh zhukov" binds a girl's developing body to previous sexual abuse and fears of rape shared by her sister and mother. For Karpova, sexual exploitation and violence are inseparable from the overall oppression of Stalinism—while *Kazus Kukotskogo* also makes this connection, the era's impact on women's sexuality is not as dire. This shift is in part thanks to Karpova's and Vasilenko's previous fictional depictions of

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<sup>118</sup> Another factor promoting portrayal of female sexuality as autonomous is Ulitskaia's focus on interactions between girls and women where men have marginal roles. Plishkina and Chelysheva in the cycle "Devochki" (Girls) are surrounded by female friends, implying that de facto sexual segregation promotes a less traumatic path to maturity.

<sup>119</sup> Ulitskaia's "Zhenshchiny russkikh selenii..." (Women from the Russian Communities...) links quasi-lesbian activity to a crucial discovery: Margo finds a cancerous lump in Vera's breasts while massaging them (Ulitskaia 2002d, 131-32). It is significant that this scene occurs while both women are drunk—as with Plishkina and Chelysheva, there are mitigating circumstances explaining such controversial behavior.



how the Soviet state victimized women. Ulitskaia's innovative representation creates a space where a women's sexuality may evolve exclusive of exploitative relations with men.

Ulitskaia through her characters offers an alternative to the legacy of woman as victim, a legacy hinted at by Baranskaia and Grekova and then elaborated during perestroika. Using exceptional situations (heavy drinking, a children's game) and lively diction, she forges a ludic alternative to previous depictions. The result is a discussion of controversial themes that is unusual and far more complex than Ol'ga Tatarinova's attack on clichéd depictions of love: "Everything is a sham... Love is the biggest sham of all, getting people to torture themselves and bear new guinea pigs" for God's experiments (*Chego khochet zhenshchina...* 245). This denunciation bears the stamp of perestroika's proclivity for negation, which authors such as Slutskina employed to dismantle existing stereotypes while not providing an alternative system of representation. Tatarinova's story, tellingly titled "Seksopatologiiia" (Sexual Pathology), is more a literary manifesto than a work of literature per se: it diagnoses the problem (love as trap) but provides neither prevention nor cure. While exemplifying the lingering *Zeitgeist* that Mariia Abasheva called an "anti-world," Tatarinova's story lacks the enduring interest of the multifaceted account of female sexuality in "Vetrianaia ospa" or *Medeia i ee deti* (Abasheva 11).

Imagining sexuality as discovery stresses a woman's growth and autonomy if her partner is significantly older. Years after the incident, seventh-grader Bron'ka in Ulitskaia's eponymous story claims she truly loved the elderly neighbor she seduced (Ulitskaia 2002a, 36). The narrator presents this denouement—the explanation for Bron'ka's repeated pregnancies—as a mystery rather than the crime that it was. Her friend Irina Mikhailovna even feels a momentary stab of envy, as if her life were incomplete because it lacks such a hidden love. Unlike with

Baranskaia's Zoika, such a misalliance is not ascribed to previous sexual abuse: Bron'ka's choice signals her autonomy.

Ol'ga Lobova's "Lëniny sny" (Lenia's Dreams) gives a more elaborate example of precocious female sexual activity with an older man. Vassa became pregnant at fifteen after sleeping with the artist for whom she posed as a nude model; as she explains to her husband Lenia, she wanted to experience as much as possible (*Chego khochet zhenshchina...* 291-92). Marrying Lenia under the condition that he not interfere with her art, she then has an affair with the presumably younger model Pavel. In a fairly obvious plot construction, her sexual and artistic apprenticeship precedes autonomy.<sup>120</sup> The narrative asserts that Vassa's sexual and emotional independence comes from her voluntary and early sexual experience. As in Larissa Sergeeva's self-explanatory "Voz'mu parnia v arendu" (I'll Rent Myself a Boy, *Mariia* 1995), Lobova reverses the traditional dichotomy (here, male/artist and female/muse). However, the gendered imbalance of power remains, hinting that this work limits itself to what Gabrielian terms a pattern of rebellion (1996, 43). While such role-reversals were unthinkable during the Thaw and Stagnation and innovative during perestroika, in the post-Soviet context they are rather clichéd.

Ulitskaia's *Sonechka* juxtaposes the results of early voluntary and forced sexual activity. Tania, Sonechka's daughter, has a variety of lovers and during sex sees herself as an equal

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<sup>120</sup> In Ulitskaia's "Gulia" the protagonist of the same name seduces the much younger San Sanych (Ulitskaia 2002a, 93). However, unlike in Baranskaia's "Potselui" (The Kiss), this atypical scenario is not the focus of the story (although Gulia subsequently brags about her conquest) (Goscilo 1995b, xv). Indeed, Ulitskaia's narrative, unlike the works by Baranskaia and Lobova, stresses sexuality between an older woman and younger man as only one part of an interaction promoting emotional stability for both.

partner (Ulitskaia 1997, 303-304). Iasia, however, was coerced into intercourse when she was twelve: for her sexuality is only a vehicle to achieve the otherwise impossible, e.g., she is able to live first with Robert Viktorovich and then move to Paris (Ulitskaia 1997, 319).<sup>121</sup>

Anastasiia Volek and Galina Skvortsova take a much dimmer view of older men and younger women. In Volek's "Moia boginia" (My Goddess) the narrator is the lover of almost elderly Fedor, who takes her to Paris and calls himself a "vampire," i.e., an unnaturally old male who inherently exploits others (*Chego khochet zhenshchina...* 162). The narrator gains nothing from this experience: the story's tone implies that her experience is not far removed from that of Iasia.

Such scenarios have broader cultural implications. In Skvortsova's "Russkaia dusha" (Russian Soul) the American Michael has an affair with married Ol'ga Kazanova, who in turn discovers the Westerner with a buxom younger woman (*Russkaia dusha* 172, 176). This detail is especially galling to Ol'ga, who, as the narrator disapprovingly relates, fed her child from a bottle to preserve the shape of her breasts (*Russkaia dusha* 174). The affair between Ol'ga's younger rival and Michael stresses several patterns in post-Soviet culture, women's prose, and Russian literature as a whole: older men and younger women, the unfaithful wife as doomed (e.g., Anna

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<sup>121</sup> Ulitskaia and LoboVA are not the only authors to connect healthy sexuality with voluntary decisions. In Natal'ia Lavretsova's possibly autobiographical "Artemych" the protagonist feels betrayed when the middle-aged Artemych strokes her while she sleeps: their previously platonic relationship has been transformed without her consent (*Zhena, kotoraiia umela letat'* 180-81). The bucolic story of friendship in the forest becomes one of disillusionment and self-consciousness over how men perceive her body.

Karenina), and predacious foreigners exploiting Russian women.<sup>122</sup> None too subtly emphasizing the third issue, the narrator alludes to a dream where Michael sells Ol'ga (*Russkaia dusha* 173-74).

Ol'ga's symbolic first name ("holy"), last name (related to the city of Kazan', with its famous icon of the Virgin Mary), and nickname ("Russian Soul") emphasize her "Russianness." However, this identity is thoroughly corrupt: both she and her husband are unfaithful and the bottle-feeding implies that Ol'ga has broken one of Russian culture's central maternal taboos by placing physical appearance above her child's health.<sup>123</sup> Her last name (Kazanova) suggests "Casanova," reiterating bifurcation between traditional (viz., chaste) Russian femininity and the morally suspect women led astray by the West. This context complicates the idea of the "Russian soul," a problem lost on those (including Skvortsova) who chose this title for an anthology lauding provincial female identity. The carnal Kazanova provides another instance of

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<sup>122</sup> The last of these patterns has become a well-publicized controversy in the Russian Federation, where a host of on-line and in-person dating services match young women with typically older foreign men. One site claims that its clients can find a suitable wife within several months for \$10,000 (<http://www.bride.ru/ph/htcgi/service/marriage.html>). By comparison, there is little outcry over the trafficking in women and girls from Russia that escalated in the 1990s ("Victims of Trafficking" 124-25).

<sup>123</sup> In one of the anthology's introductory articles Elena Markova notes that this choice shows that Ol'ga has changed from mother to courtesan (*Russkaia dusha* 18). The story also warns against "xenophilia," suggesting a clear distinction between Russian/pure and alien/impure, which "Russkaia dusha" challenges (*Russkaia dusha* 18).

Rovenskaia's assertion that ideology operates on women through their bodies—a truism extending to the sometimes essentialist dicta of women's prose (2000, 191).

Ulitskaia describes sexual relations between men as less exploitative than Kazanova's experiences. Her gay characters are presented as complicated individuals, unlike the marginal and miscreant stereotyped homosexuals in Petrushevskaja's works. Andrei's behavior in *Vremia noch'* links being gay to social problems: alcoholism and rapes in prison. Ulitskaia's "Golubchik" (Sweetie), in contrast, sees homosexuality as a way of life and implies that homosexuals are neither "temporarily" gay (Andrei) nor exist only in terms of sexual orientation (Petrushevskaja's Gulia in "Muzyka ada" and Tokareva's conniving Barbara in "Lilovyi kostium").

Within this humanized context the narrator of "Golubchik" conveys the irrelevance of whether Slava was born a homosexual or "made" one by Nikolai Romanovich (Ulitskaia 2002d, 240). What is important is the series of consequences. First, Slava clearly is satisfied with many of his affairs, including his first sexual encounter with a man he meets on the street.

Сильная мужская любовь, о которой прежде Слава смутно догадывался. Пахло вазелином и кровью. Это было то самое, чего хотелось Славе и чего Николай Романович не мог ему дать. Брачная ночь, ночь посвящения и такого наслаждения, что никакой музыке и не снилось. У Славы началась новая жизнь... (Улицкая 2002d, 243)

It was strong manly love, which Slava could only guess about before. It smelled of blood and vaseline. It was what Slava had wanted and what Nikolai Romanovich could not give him. It was a wedding night, a night of dedication and

such indulgence that Slava did not dream of music. Slava was beginning a new life...

There are striking parallels between this description of first “real” love and Sandra’s variegated sexual experiences. While *Medeia i ee deti* does not give any purely physical descriptions (blood, vaseline), relevant passages from both works stress how sexuality connects the physiological and mental worlds. For Slava sleeping with the stranger brings relief from his obsessive thoughts about music—sex is not limited to the accretion of bodily functions and moral deficiencies that Petrushevskaja reveals. The sense of discovery is more pronounced than that connected with the wedding game in “Vetrianaia ospa”—while Slava’s affair does not lead to marriage in the conventional sense, it resembles the image of the heterosexual “first night”: one partner initiates another into the pleasurable mysteries of sexuality.

“Golubchik” suggests that the culpable party in homosexuality is not the gay lovers but the state, which imprisons the protagonist several times under Soviet anti-sodomy laws and is indifferent to his murder (Ulitskaia 2002d, 243-45). Ulitskaia’s gay men resemble the female characters of Vasilenko and Karpova—both face actual or symbolic violence from the state. Petrushevskaja’s Gulia, in contrast, is a clearly reprehensible character: she is expelled from college for seducing underage girls (Petrushevskaja 1998, 84).

Humanizing homosexuality continues the trend shaping depictions of Medeia’s and Nad’ka-Ganna’s emotional and spiritual families. Such a development means that gender is a construct instead of a “natural” truth, a distinction Ulitskaia asserts in an interview when connecting literary images of homosexuality to blurred gender lines (2002, 80). Gender identity, by this logic, is a function of experience and emotion instead of anatomical causality.

The relaxation of gender roles has its limits. Ulitskaia and Vasilenko highlight two types of female heterosexual characters demarcating these boundaries: the saint and the disabled woman. Medeia and Nad'ka-Ganna are both beatified in various ways. The protagonist of *Medeia i ee deti* creates a home that is more metaphorical than physical—this transcendence, which Rovenskaia associates with *bytie*—encompasses the Christian virtues of love and sacrifice (2001a, 26). Preserving the home distinguishes the protagonist from her vengeful namesake in Greek mythology. Chastity, kindness, and self-sacrifice connect Medeia to women such as Iuliana Lazarevskaia and Fevroniia from hagiographic tradition (Rovenskaia 2001b, 162). As with the novel's depictions of the erotic, Medeia's saintly characteristics are muted and diffused. As a result she emerges as a well-defined character favorably contrasting with Skvortsova's stereotypical Kazanova, Lobova's stylized Vassa, or the “angel of the house” Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar critique in English literature (Gilbert and Gubar 22).

Nad'ka-Ganna is a more complex figure.<sup>124</sup> The protagonist of a “novel-hagiography,” Nad'ka-Ganna embodies several topoi from the saint's life. While still a child she helps the other orphans and even Traktorina Petrovna, whose Stalinist name and cruelty make her resemble a petty anti-Christ. Like both female and male saints (Lazarevskaia, Feodosii) Nad'ka-Ganna is beset by demons in the form of Leshka Orliak's men, who nearly rape her, and the three Soviet

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<sup>124</sup> Her doubled name evokes Judeo-Christian traditions beyond the Marianite associations: Nad'ka is the diminutive of “Nadezhda” (Hope), one of three early Christian martyrs (Faith, Hope, Charity) later associated with the tricolor Russian flag. Ganna (Hannah), the mother of the judge Samuel, is one of seven Tamudic prophetesses. Connections between Christian and pagan culture (Nad'ka-Ganna as *mat' syra zemlia*) echo the double faith marking the practice of Russian Orthodoxy, particularly in the countryside.

soldiers who succeed (2000 103-04, 119). Instead of the typical posthumous miracles, she gives birth while she is alive and by doing so forestalls death.

As the novel's title implies, Nad'ka-Ganna also comes from the tradition of the holy fool (*durochka, iurodivaia*). She exists outside the norms of acceptable behavior, communicating with God in a way that others cannot. This implicit challenge to church hierarchy resonates with her two main Christian identities: martyr saint and Virgin Mary. Nad'ka-Ganna does not speak—Traktorina Petrovna has usurped such verbal discourse—but sings and shrieks (Vasilenko 2000 23-24, 19).<sup>125</sup> Non-verbal communication has long been the provenance of women in folk tradition, e.g., those afflicted with *klikushestvo* (shrieking sickness) in response to possession by evil spirits (Ivanits 49). In *Durochka* the girl's screams imply the contrary: the unclean forces are outside of Nad'ka-Ganna (collectivization, the impending nuclear strike, and so forth).<sup>126</sup>

Lack of speech connects Nad'ka-Ganna to a series of disabled female characters in Ulitskaia's prose. Elena in *Kazus Kukotskogo* has a fit of amnesia after visiting a church while troubled by her family (Ulitskaia 2002b, 184-87). After regaining her memory she remains senile, a psychosomatic manifestation of her declining marriage to Pavel Aleksandrovich following a bitter argument over abortion. In many of Ulitskaia's narratives being in a disabled

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<sup>125</sup> While she does not speak per se, Nad'ka-Ganna's outbursts and songs recall what Vasilenko notes was the alternate title for *Ne pomniashchaia zla: Velikaia nemaia zagovorila* (The Great Silent Woman Has Spoken) (Vasilenko 2001, 85). Vasilenko joins this silence to women's opinions, which female authors could more fully express during perestroika.

<sup>126</sup> The village near the orphanage has itself become a community of deaf-mutes—victims of Stalinist deportations who have chosen silence as a form of passive resistance (Vasilenko 2000, 13).



state is a sign of protest: Elena foregoes many of the activities of mother and wife, e.g., she and Pavel Aleksandrovich have not had sex for many years. Anfisa in *Vdovii parokhod* undergoes a similar transformation after her stroke, indirectly forcing Vadim to take care of her just as she earlier took responsibility for him as a child. However, unlike in Grekova's story, there is no redemptive transformation: Pavel Aleksandrovich is daily reminded of the irreversible damage he helped to cause.<sup>127</sup>

While Elena is a living reproach to her erring husband, Lialia's condition in "Lialin dom" (Lialia's Home) comes from her own transgression—a mistake resembling the characters of Petrushevskaiia more than those of Ulitskaia. During an affair with her son's friend, Lialia discovers her daughter in bed with the same teenage boy and in the same position (Ulitskaia 2002a, 75, 78). After recovering from shock, she is constantly happy but pities all things living and inanimate. Formerly callous (Lialia believed that adultery solidified her marriage), she is now overly compassionate (Ulitskaia 2002a, 69). Unlike the author's other disabled characters, Lialia's fate has an incongruously pat element of justice.

The silence and mumbling of Ulitskaia's and Vasilenko's characters sharply contrast with the clamor in perestroika women's prose. Petrushevskaiia's Anna Andrianovna epitomizes the era's tendency to dominate through verbal expression—*Vremia noch'* is a solipsistic soliloquy

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<sup>127</sup> In Ulitskaia's "Chuzhie deti" (A Stranger's Children) Margarita falls into a catatonic state after her husband Sergo accuses her of giving birth to another man's children (2002a, 132). Her helplessness is the result of his unjustified suspicions—she often talks to the (imaginary) spouse who still loves her while Sergo is in the room.

with motherhood as a pretext.<sup>128</sup> The indignant tone of works such as Palei's *Otdel propavshchikhsia* and Glinka's "'Kolymskii tramvai' srednei tiazhosti" intensifies the content, e.g. the inhumane medical system or the horrors of the gulag. By the late 1990s characters' silence suggests that Vasilenko and Ulitskaia no longer posited a link between reader awareness and redressing problems. This recognition challenges the documentary impulse uniting Baranskaia and Grekova. While Ulitskaia and Vasilenko inherited stylistic and thematic commonalities (focus on everyday life, discussion of "female" spaces, and so forth) from these earlier chroniclers, post-Soviet use of incoherent or mute characters questions the efficacy of traditional modes of communication as a means to convince the reader to be aware of social problems.

On a broader level the shift from shrill critique to silence echoes the intelligentsia's realization of its reduced importance after the end of the USSR. Stephen Lovell notes that in the early 1990s sales of mass literature (historical novels, mysteries, and so forth) eclipsed those of works by high-culture authors such as Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and Vladimir Nabokov (132). As the Introduction argues, the profit-oriented nature of such publications made them not entirely "popular" in Raymond Williams's sense of being from and for the common people (Williams 199, qtd. in McGuigan 1993b, 164). Whatever their origin, these works showed that the intelligentsia no longer controlled non-official views on Russian culture. The escalating outrage

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<sup>128</sup> Characterizing herself as a dramatist, Petrushevskaia in her prose must use words to shape images instead of relying on the stage. In *Vremia noch'* and *Svoi krug* there are no descriptions directly conveyed to the reader without the protagonist-narrator's overbearing assistance; the reader must navigate around this obstacle to construct meaning.

during perestroika from Andrei Sakharov and other intellectuals gave way to exhaustion and the silent protest that critics such as Ihab Hassan identify with postmodernist culture (11).

Post-Soviet women's prose calls upon a variety of devices to depict less rigid gender roles. For Ulitskaia this relaxation reveals itself through a style describing sexuality in a "low-key" yet more refined manner. Ulitskaia and Lobova convey women characters' experiences (e.g., those of Tania, Vassa) to imply that sexual activity can be an empowering process of exploration, while *Sonechka's* Iasia indicates that early coercive experience is damaging. Ulitskaia destabilizes gender lines and shows the state to be exploitative when she depicts homosexuality as a way of life rather than an illness. Two types of characters—the female saint and the disabled woman—emphasize traditional feminine kindness (Medeia, Nad'ka-Ganna) and the continuing problem of male suspicion and competition for men (Margarita, Lialia). Silent or incoherent characters problematize the struggle to describe and improve women's *byt*, an effort that motivated the prose of Baranskaia and Grekova.

#### **4.3. Locating Women's Prose: Feminism and the New Cultural Divide**

From 1989 to 1991 women's prose resurfaced as a discernible trend in Soviet literature, with supporters and opponents debating its existence and characteristics (ateleological time, depiction of extreme situations, and so forth). The post-Soviet era has solidified the status of female authors. Critics focused on the relation of women's prose to elite and mass literature as well as connections between authors such as Tatarinova and the feminist theory that had begun to appear in academic circles. Ulitskaia receiving the prestigious Booker Prize (2001) and a series by the Vagrius publishing house established women's prose as a permanent feature in high culture.

A short story contest in 1992 hoped to link feminism and women's prose. Sponsored by the feminist journal *Preobrazhenie*, respected "thick" journal *Oktiabr'* (October), Columbia University, and others, the competition received some 500 submissions. The jury included novelists (Fazil' Iskander, Vladimir Makanin), critics (Zoia Boguslavskaia, Lev Rubinshtein, Galina Belaia, Mariia Mikhailova, Elena Trofimova), and two US professors (Goscilo, Marina Ledkovsky) (*Chego khochet zhenshchina...* 6). The committee's makeup indicates that not only feminist critics (e.g., Boguslavskaia, Mikhailova) but also "traditional" authors (Iskander, Makanin) recognized the legitimacy of this literature.<sup>129</sup>

Diana Medman, the sponsor of the now defunct *Preobrazhenie*, was disappointed with the contest's submissions: "As a rule the heroine constantly perpetuates the situation causing her degradation and suffering," which passes for women's "natural role" in society (*Chego khochet zhenshchina...* 286). What is lacking is the "positive cultural potential that is the feminist mentality"—because of this shortcoming the jury did not award a first prize (*Chego khochet zhenshchina...* 287).

Medman's vague formulation has several implications. First, she tacitly acknowledges a basic characteristic of women's prose inherited from the 1960s-80s: the presence of a female protagonist whose life is unsatisfying due to (often unacknowledged) gender inequality. However, like Western feminists such as Rita Felski, Medman implies that description of oppression should lead to recognition of this injustice and then to change in the depicted reality

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<sup>129</sup> The print-run of the anthology (*Chego khochet zhenshchina... What a Woman Wants...*, 1993) was fairly large for a high-literature work in the early 1990s: 10,000 copies. However, some of these were never sold. In 2000 Moscow's Letnii sad (Summer Garden) bookstore was simply giving away *Chego khochet zhenshchina...*

(Felski 162). For her the key element of feminist literature is an explicitly theorized discussion of gendered oppression, which is absent in a story such as “Seksopatologiiia” despite generalizations concerning women’s subordinate status (e.g., love as a trap to ensure procreation) (*Chego khochet zhenshchina...* 245). Medman implies that a work is unproductive from a feminist viewpoint if it contains no description of how to overcome gendered disparities. Such a standpoint ignores the creative blurring of gender roles in works by Ulitskaia and Vasilenko or Baranskaia’s and Grekova’s efforts to establish women’s *byt* as a legitimate literary topic.

Medman sees women’s prose and the “feminist mentality” as a pair where the first term should lead to the second, an ideologized relationship recalling socialist realism’s move from spontaneity to consciousness. She does not ponder why many of the best-known female authors (e.g., Petrushevskaiia, Sadur, Tat’iana Tolstaia) ignored the contest: probably out of opposition to a project overtly connected to what Trofimova terms the “gendered aspect” of literature (*Chego khochet zhenshchina...* 9). These writers’ absence from post-Soviet women’s anthologies also indicates that the solidarity that Vasilenko saw in collections such as *Novye amazonki* was often only a shortcut to publication (Vasilenko 2001, 83-85).<sup>130</sup> Medman’s desire to meld feminist theory and women’s prose does not reflect the reality of post-Soviet women’s writing.

Tat’iana Meleshko refrains from defining feminist writing or overtly connecting it to female authors but does identify several theoretically informed traits of women’s prose. Eight descriptors imply that this literature uses specific characters, images, and issues to critique

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<sup>130</sup> The anthology *Bryzgi shampanskogo* (Splashes of Champagne, 2002), compiled by Vasilenko, continues this trend. Other than Tokareva, Tat’iana Nabatnikova, and Nina Katerli, no authors who were highly visible in the late 1980s participated in the collection, although well-known newer writers did appear (Ol’ga Slavnikova, Marina Vishnevetskaia).

Russian culture's images of women. 1. Authorial consciousness as either systematic or rhizomatic, with the latter and more favorable term in Gilles Deleuze's dichotomy connoting escape from patriarchal structure (the postmodernist prose of Valeriia Narbikova). 2. How the work depicts the opposition male/female and ways to overcome this opposition (Vasilenko's challenging religious hierarchy in her depiction of the Mother of God as messiah in *Durochka*). 3. Connections between space and the narrative (water in *Shamara* as reflecting the fluidity of women's experiences). 4. Untraditional archetypes (Vasilenko's Amazons in *Novye amazonki* and the physically forceful protagonist in *Shamara*). 5. Intertextuality as a support for gender-oriented narratives (the tradition of black humor that Petrushevskaiia's prose co-opts). 6. *Telesnost'* as a foundational theme that reflects women's problems in society (Palei's abortion ward and Tatarinova's sexual pathology). 7. The *durochka* (Vasilenko's novel-hagiography, Tolstaia's Pipka, and Palei's Mon'ka). 8. An ending emphasizing flying or departure (Nad'ka-Ganna's ascent) (Meleshko 1-5).

Unlike Medman, Meleshko provides a set of characteristics instead of dictating the purpose of women's prose. Observations concerning the vaguely phrased "authorial consciousness" recall Elaine Showalter's third and most developed stage of feminist literary criticism: recognizing a distinct body of women's writing while continuing to examine and rework how the image of women appears in male prose (1985, 8). For both Russian and Anglo-American female authors, women's writing implies awareness of canonical (viz., male) images of women. All of Meleshko's typological descriptors stem from male-dominated Russian literature as a context for women's prose (e.g., the prodigal son as archetype in Erofeev's *Moskva-Petushki*). Such a situation recalls one of the key problems in feminist theory: the

legitimacy of reliance on sexist tropes and traditions in the process of critiquing gender inequality (Butler x-xi).

However, for Meleshko the innovations of authors such as Palei or Petrushevskaiia herald a new form of writing. Meleshko, unlike Medman, does not advocate explicitly formulating the “feminist mentality” as the only alternative to naturalizing women’s oppression. Instead, the critic’s descriptors map a literature that is moving towards a different image of women. This new image may fulfill Medman’s wish, but in a less obtrusive manner (e.g., how Ulitskaia’s and Lobova’s young women equate the *telesnost’* of sexuality with autonomy as well as exploitation). Meleshko builds on both hostile and supportive perestroika-era criticism (Abasheva, Oleg Dark, Pavel Basinskii) while identifying women’s prose through an accretion of details, characters, and patterns. These features encompass independent women aware of gendered oppression (Lobova’s Vassa) who, however, do not espouse the feminist rhetoric that is anathema to most female authors. While Medman prescribes a connection between women’s prose and feminism, Meleshko locates less intrusive links between the two.

Like Meleshko, Gabrielian and Rovenskaia provide broader assessments of women’s prose—they see a tripartite structure relating literature and feminist theory. Gabrielian distinguishes three tendencies: mimicry, rebellion, and a blurring of self and other (1996, 43). The rubric of mimicry encompasses Baranskaia and Grekova, who cast themselves as Soviet authors documenting specific problems of the female quotidian. The rebellion evokes the anti-world Abasheva describes in such perestroika-era works as “Chervivyi synok.” The diversified image of gays and the emotional/spiritual family constitute the blurring of self and other (female and male, heterosexual and homosexual). By default, Gabrielian sees this blurring as the most productive path for women’s prose: mimicry and rebellion replicate patriarchal culture, whether

through support or opposition. Irina Savkina follows this reasoning when she proposes that women's prose must move beyond "gathering stones" or reclaiming lost traditions—i.e., what Showalter labels the first and second stages of feminist literary criticism (Savkina 1996, 364; Showalter 1985, 5-6).

The prose of Petrushevskaja and, in a less dramatic manner, Tatarinova upholds Savkina's and Gabrielian's conceptions: describing the bestial side of human existence opposes the idealism of socialist realism and confirms the physical/ideal binary. Because Russian culture binds the physical to the feminine/*byt* and the ideal with the masculine/*bytie*, what results from the style of Petrushevskaja and Tatarinova is a paradoxical support through rebellion that solidifies restrictive categories.<sup>131</sup>

Rovenskaia's tripartite categorization of women's prose is chronological but parallels that of Gabrielian. The first stage, beginning in 1979 and involving the *Mariia* group in Leningrad, stressed women's themes in literature and criticism. The period of women's anthologies followed in the late 1980s-90s. The third stage, which began in 1994-95, encompassed increased contact with foreigners and the end of women's collections (2002, 294-309).<sup>132</sup> These stages

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<sup>131</sup> In this sense Ulitskaia's artistic depictions of the mundane (sexuality, family life, and so forth) are liberating: they suggest that the ideal can be found within the physical. In her works this is even more evident if the physical is flawed: "Narod izbrannyi" (The Chosen People), shows through the crippled beggar Katia that the truly poor are the only ones fortunate to serve God (Ulitskaia 2002a, 107). Unlike Margarita, Elena, or Lialia, Katia's handicap comes from the Lord instead of resulting from earthly transgression.

<sup>132</sup> Natal'ia Perova, editor of *Glas*, also implies a three-part development in women's prose. In the first issue devoted to female authors (*Glas* 3), Perova maintains that the characters created by



approximate in chronologically distinct form the tendencies that Gabrielian sees as existing simultaneously in women's prose. The mimicry of Baranskaia and Grekova dominates Rovenskaia's first stage, while the rise of women's collections accompanied the rebellion (Sadur, Elena Tarasova) as part of the perestroika esthetic of negation. The post-Soviet era contains authors who blend the boundaries between self and other, e.g., Ulitskaia and Vasilenko with their revised image of the family. Rovenskaia, like Meleshko and Gabrielian, provides relatively loose descriptors of women's prose and its relationship to feminism, as is appropriate for critical responses to a literature that is still developing.

During perestroika, when anthologies were making women's prose visible and controversial, Abasheva established a pattern in assessing this literature. Claiming that Narbikova, Tolstaia, Sadur, and Petrushevskiaia were more talented than the collections' remaining authors, she characterized these other writers' works as "ladies' prose" belonging to mass culture (13-14). Rovenskaia notes that this strategy recurs in such criticism: dividing one's favorite authors from their literary milieu and thus disregarding the stylistic, thematic, and historical characteristics women's prose shares (2000, 82). Another result is the paradoxical cumulative effect of critics such as Abasheva and Slavnikova distinguishing "their" writers from the less talented: all maintain that talented women authors exist, yet including all the varying exceptions leaves very few. The stylistic and thematic continuities inherited from Baranskaia,

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the authors (Glinka, Shcherbakova, and others) do not know that they are oppressed, while the second and third volumes (*Glas* 13, *Glas* 30) show awareness of this injustice and attempt to struggle against it (interview 2003). Perova's assessment hints that she, like Felski and Medman, feels a need to identify social action as the telos of women's prose.

Grekova, and Iurii Trifonov link perestroika and post-Soviet women's prose to high literature through commonalities that make the isolation of any single writer a distortion.

Despite the dissenting opinions of Abasheva and Slavnikova, since the late 1990s much of women's prose has established itself as a recognized portion of high literature. The prestigious Vagrius and popular Eksmo publishing houses have issued Ulitskaia, Vasilenko, Shcherbakova, and Petrushevskaiia, a milestone that Trofimova uses to prove this literature's cultural value (and profitability) (2002, 14). Vagrius's recent series *Zhenskii pocherk: Nastoiashchaia zhenskaia proza* (Women's Handwriting: Real Women's Prose, 1999-2001) featured Vasilenko, Ulitskaia, Slavnikova, and Shcherbakova alongside translations of Joyce Carol Oates and Iris Murdoch. Slavnikova, unsurprisingly, argues that the series charts the boundary between women's prose and other, less worthy writing—however, the inclusion of romance author Nataliia Medvedeva complicates this statement (Slavnikova 2000, 2; Vardenga 12). Medvedeva's presence suggests that Vagrius sees women's prose as bringing together both high literature and “select” mass-market authors. This view locates women's prose between high and low culture, a situation that would have been impossible in the more polarized environment that accompanied the collapse of high-literature sales in the early 1990s.<sup>133</sup>

This variegated series reveals two commonplaces of post-Soviet literary culture: 1. Certain types of literature are inherently “better.” Echoing Iurii Tynianov's distinction between literary *byt* and “true” art, this first conception asserts that high literature employs artistic depiction of life instead of allowing the content to determine representation (e.g., the convoluted

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<sup>133</sup> Vagrius still carefully separates the series from other, presumably less worthy types of writing by women: “This is not ‘women's novels’ in a middle-brow sense. This is real literature”

(<http://www.vagrius.ru/series/>).

romance plot) (Tynianov 19; Fedotova 222). 2. Literature must either sell itself or eventually vanish. A book of women's prose not only discusses daily life but is a physical presence in *byt* itself, a unit sold on the streets.

Despite its contested position, there is substantial evidence for the success of post-Soviet women's prose as high literature. Nadezhda Azhgikhina points to Ulitskaia's receipt of the Booker Prize as a sign that female authors have a firm, visible place in the pantheon of Russian high culture (interview 2003). Slavnikova for her part asserts that women's being the majority of readers explains the success of women's prose (2000, 7). This reason, plus the light yet engaging prose of authors such as Ulitskaia and Palei, explains why women writers have gained wider popularity in an era when the nation lacks time for overly serious reading (Perova interview 2003).

Diverse stylistic innovation and talented authors such as Shcherbakova and Petrushevskaja provided consumers with sophisticated yet highly readable visions of everyday life.<sup>134</sup> While women authors still experienced difficulties with publication in the 1990s, these barriers were sooner due to the economic factors cited by Lovell than to prejudices against female writers (Lovell 132; Azhgikhina interview 2003). On the whole, however, since 1991 women's prose has distinguished itself in quality and print-runs: in 2000-2002 Eksmo and

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<sup>134</sup> Such innovation outstripped the staid work of Baranskaia and Grekova, who began to lose readers during perestroika and were all but forgotten by the late 1990s. Eksmo reissued Grekova's *Svezho predanie* and several other works in 2002. Several months before, however, even salespeople in central Moscow bookstores rarely recognized the author's name.

Vagrius issued Ulitskaia's works in 10,000 and even 20,000 copies respectively, while Petrushevskaiia's 2003 collection of autobiographical essays reached 11,000.<sup>135</sup>

During the 1990s several critics debated connections between women's prose and feminist issues (Meleshko, Rovenskaia, Gabrielian), even as a wider debate (Slavnikova, Azhgikhina, Vardenga, and others) attempted to locate this writing in the new divide between elite and mass writing. As noted in the Introduction, such placement reiterates long-standing connections among women, *byt*, and popular culture, with all three components allegedly antithetical to "true" literature.

#### 4.4. Redeeming *Byt*: Everyday Life as Artistic Resource

From the early 1960s to the mid-1980s many critics saw women authors' depiction of *byt* as at best a springboard to more important and appropriate topics. During perestroika its depictions of the quotidian were attacked as reflecting the worst aspects of an increasingly chaotic external reality—critics assailed many images as *chernukha*, thus antithetical to serious literature. After 1991, however, Gorlanova, Vasilenko and particularly Ulitskaia envisioned *byt* as a valuable resource in itself. Immersing themselves in the everyday, these three writers attempted to transcend what critics saw as its limits: transience, banality, physicality. This approach accompanied tendencies to represent *byt* as an artistic realm divergent from the sometimes journalistic depictions of Baranskaia and Grekova as well as Petrushevskaiia's gritty dramas.

Gorlanova's "Kak napisat' rasskaz" (How to Write a Story) maintains that *byt* does not oppose literature—in fact, the struggle to care for family and self provides "algorithms" for

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<sup>135</sup> These figures are double those of Grekova, whose *Svezho predanie* was reissued in a run of 5,000. *Bryzgi shampanskogo* was also published with this number of copies.

literary creation (*Russkaia dusha* 198). Her argument resembles the narrative strategies of works such as Baranskaia's *Nedelia kak nedelia*, where the demands of everyday life shape plot and style as harried Ol'ga describes the quotidian. This stance also challenges Fedotova's and Tynianov's distinction between "true art" and "byt-driven" literature: Gorlanova denies a division between literature and life, since the latter provides its own comedies and tragedies. Such a formulation also contradicts Rovenskaia's idea that for Gorlanova society instead of nature binds women to *byt* (Rovenskaia 2000, 109). From the writer's viewpoint the lack of a gap between literature and externality makes the origin of female relations to the everyday a moot point: *byt* is inseparable from culture, rendering the gender of the quotidian unimportant.

Rovenskaia is more accurate when she sees women's prose after 1991 as diving into *byt* in order to overcome its limitations (2000, 115). Both she and Gorlanova argue that the quotidian per se is valuable to the author: for Rovenskaia, however, the everyday then leads to still worthier things. Such an approach echoes those seeing *byt* as a conduit to higher meaning in the prose of Baranskaia and Grekova (El'sberg 4; Novikova and Novikov 56). Tat'iana Taiganova makes a similar but broader argument in noting the doubled genre designation of *Durochka* (i.e., novel-hagiography). Connecting these two dissimilar types of literatures, she contends, shows that anyone's life can become exceptional (Taiganova 189). A Bakhtinian reading of this claim illuminates how Vasilenko moves between the world of the novel (contemporary, still developing) and the realm of the sacred work (ossified in an untouchable past) (Bakhtin 1992, 31, 18). *Durochka* depicts the novelization of the saint's life: the hagiographic topoi signifying a

holy life are immersed in *byt*, thereby becoming part of a living quotidian instead of venerable relics.<sup>136</sup>

Ulitskaia explains that her relationship to the everyday comes from two seemingly different disciplines: biology and applied anthropology (2002, 82, 74).<sup>137</sup> Both fields rely on accruing details to construct more general theories, with Ulitskaia mining “private life” for empirical data in an inductive approach that resembles the documentary rhetoric of Baranskaia and Grekova (Ulitskaia 2002, 80-81). Her oeuvre benefits from the efforts of these two predecessors: Ulitskaia’s prose does not need to gather evidence to counter the protestations of a critic such as Vladimir Rozanov or Viacheslav Savateev and prove that women’s quotidian is “typical” and a legitimate topic. Instead, novels such as *Medeia i ee deti* and *Kazus Kukotskogo*

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<sup>136</sup> Azhgikhina makes the crucial observation that *byt* has become more important to women authors because of this group’s falling incomes during and after perestroika, a decrease exacerbating problems of paying for groceries, salvaging pensions, and so forth (interview 2003). This appropriately prosaic formulation modifies Iurii Lotman’s discussion of the everyday and explains the visibility of *byt* in women’s prose of the late 1980s and 1990s: the quotidian becomes especially noticeable during crises (1994, 10). From another theoretical viewpoint, Georg Lukács’s axiom that literature struggles to preserve the meaning of life implies that female authors tried to safeguard significance by controlling how their fiction pictured reality (1993, 84). While for Tynianov this external universe opposes “true” art, for Lukács, Gorlanova, and others it is an opportunity to make representation establish literature’s connection with the outside world.

<sup>137</sup> Biology was her initial career choice, which she abandoned after the laboratory where she worked was closed because Ulitskaia had been discovered reading *samizdat* literature (2001, 6).

build on the conclusions of female authors from the Thaw to perestroika: society must make *byt* more livable, a transformation that Ulitskaia attempts through imaginative representation of the quotidian. What could have been a gloomy recounting of Medeia's loneliness and poverty becomes a vision of how daily life is largely what one makes of it. The author's humorous and nuanced discussions of sexuality and family relations show how these banal details harbor a world of possibilities—if Ulitskaia were to rewrite *Nedelia kak nedelia*, she would imbue the humdrum weekday narrative with the sense of excitement and interest that marks Ol'ga and Dima's honeymoon. This interest suggests a ludic worldview that sees existence as an adventure rather than the series of maternal and civic duties Baranskaia and Grekova uphold.

Nina Malygina contends that Ulitskaia's prose renders *byt* survivable by describing it in abstract terms (157). However, discussion of Sandra's sexuality reveals the author's works to be less abstract than attentive to the potential for artistic representation: rich diction, images linking the physical and mental, and light humor create a distance between the actual events described (Iasia seducing Robert Viktorovich, Sandra's many lovers) and the reader's reaction to them. In the author's story "Pikovaia dama" (Queen of Spades), Anna Fedorovna's precious early morning hours give another set of examples:

Весь дом спал, и это было блаженство, не то дарёное, не то краденое. Никто ничего от нее не требовал, нежданно-негаданно образовались свои личные два часа, и она теперь прикидывала, на что их потратит: книжку ли почитает, которую ей подарил давний пациент, знаменитый философ или филолог, то ли письмо напишет в Израиль задушевной подруге (Улицкая 2002d, 200).

The whole house was asleep and it was bliss not exactly given but not stolen either. No one demanded anything from her—her own two unforeseen hours had appeared and now she pondered how to spend them. Should she read a little of the book that a famous patient (either a philosopher or literary scholar) had given her long ago? Or should she finish the letter to a dear friend in Israel?

The scene presents the reader with a host of details that suggest Anna Fedorovna's opportunities before her mother Mur awakes and begins to demand and terrorize. The cozy domestic scene expands beyond the boundaries of the apartment as the reader learns of former friends and patients, each suggesting another excursus beyond the four walls. The banality of a few undisturbed hours becomes an opportunity for recollection and assessing opportunities, hinting that even the most ordinary of moments can be rewarding. While the narrative ends with Anna Fedorovna's death, for now her life is peaceful.<sup>138</sup>

Ulitskaia's artistic approach to depicting *byt* recalls one of the reactions in 1982 to Vasilenko's story "Za saigakami" (Going after Goat-Antelopes) by Aleksandr Prokhanov at the Gorky Literary Institute. "This is a story about that which is secret [. . .] which encircles us with every step" and must be seen with an artist's eye (23). Such a formulation, key to understanding how the ordinary appears in Vasilenko's works, recalls Trifonov's defense of *byt* as the realm

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<sup>138</sup> Such tranquility contrasts sharply with the depiction of Anna Andrianovna's free time in *Vremia noch'*. In a flashback she begins her maternal mantra: "It is night. The little one fell asleep. I am keeping watch" (Petrushevskaja 1998, 367). The scene that follows depicts how Alena stole New Year's ornaments under the pretext of giving Tima a gift. *Vremia noch'* never permits the liberating digressions of "Pikovaia dama"—Anna Andrianovna allows nothing to escape from her overprotective grasp until she realizes the family has abandoned her.



within which a talented author finds the immortal in the ephemeral (1974, 194). Ulitskaia and Vasilenko show that the everyday is a myriad of opportunities within which the sublime and mundane coexist.

Ulitskaia and Vasilenko enact this connection between the temporary and enduring by showing how a family based on emotional or spiritual ties can transcend history. Their prose likewise offers less rigid conceptions of both heterosexual and homosexual interactions, a trend also evident in stories by Lobova and Sergeeva. However, two types of female characters—the saint and disabled woman—convey traditional images of female suffering and non-verbal communication as protest, essentialist images qualified by Ulitskaia's "Narod izbrannyi." Such innovation and continuity implies that women's prose has the potential to move beyond the limiting mimicry and rebellion that marked images of the female in Thaw, Stagnation, and perestroika women's writing.

In the post-Soviet era reactions to female authors have (sometimes excessively) focused on their relation to feminism (e.g., Medman, Meleshko, Gabrielian) and the new gap between elite and popular literature (e.g., Slavnikova, Trofimova, Morozova). What has engaged most critics, however, is the increasingly diverse nature of both women's prose and how it represents everyday life. Critics and authors have created several interrelated metaphors to address the artistic potential of *byt*. Such varied images imply a need to organize the quotidian in terms of one's personal understanding, an understanding that allows the author to structure and mold the formless expanse of daily life.

## 5. Conclusion: Gender, Cultural Divides, and the Future of Women's Prose

Representation of everyday life guided the transformation of post-Stalinist women's writing from select documentation to broadened critique and artistic treatment while making this literature widely available to the Soviet reading public. Emphasis on *byt* and gender combine within narratives using temporality to focus on history and the family. Since 1991 this choice of topics has helped both intellectual and "ordinary" readers identify with prose that deals with controversial subjects such as homosexuality. The end of the intelligentsia's monopoly on literary production has shown women authors to be quite successful in adapting to the Russian Federation's new publishing conditions.

The future of women's writing (and of Russian writing in general) will likely reflect the long-standing distinction between literature of the "center" (Moscow/St. Petersburg) and that of the provinces.<sup>139</sup> However, divergence between elite and popular writing after 1991 has had an

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<sup>139</sup> A thorough examination of provincial women's writing is beyond the scope of this study. My analysis generalizes based on materials in the several anthologies published in the regions after 1991: *Zhena, kotoraiia umela letat'* (The Wife Who Could Fly, 1993), *Mariia* (1995), and *Ruskaia dusha. Chego khochet zhenshchina...* also contains several authors from outside the "center": Nina Gorlanova, Alla Sel'ianova, Anastasiia Volek, and Mariia Kirpichnikova. These collections highlight a few talented authors (Gorlanova and Lobova in *Chego khochet zhenshchina...*) against a backdrop of repetitive stories of disappointed love, shattered families, and crushing poverty (Svetlana Pushkina in *Mariia*, Marina Plekhanova in *Zhena, kotoraiia umela letat'*). These anthologies, however, are atypical because of the simple fact that they are available in Moscow—many provincial publications do not reach the capital (Kuz'michev 224).

even larger impact on women's prose.<sup>140</sup> Andreas Huyssen observes that popular culture has long been considered urban, feminine, and disruptive (47, 53). Such suspect associations crept into the allegedly gender-neutral Soviet criticism of the 1960s-1970s, as when one critic labeled Grekova's *Na ispytaniakh a damskaia povest'* (women's tale) (Skvortsov 26).<sup>141</sup>

Critics' distinctions between high and low post-Soviet literature rely on an argument that L. Skvortsov and others employed earlier to denigrate women's prose. Critics ascribe sophisticated analysis of everyday life to elite literature, while believing that its popular counterpart suffers from a naïve view of the quotidian. When Vladimir Bondarenko makes the odd claim that Petrushevskia depicts the "cozy" *byt* of feminine existence, the reader can infer that for him all women authors are addicted to the trifles of everyday life and duly show as much

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<sup>140</sup> Stephen Lovell argues that two crucial trends marked literature from 1986 to 1995. First, "the figure of the Russian reader became thoroughly demythologized," moving from rhetorical emblem ("the most avid readers in the world") to a mere "socio-economic reality." At the same time the book trade was exposed to a market hungry for the Western-style mass genres often marginalized during the Soviet era (Lovell 158). The year 1993 was fatal for high culture authors as overstocking and nonpayment became commonplace (Korobov 84). However, diminished interest in high literature should be seen in relative terms: in the 1990s fiction was still more popular in Russia than in France, the US, or United Kingdom (Morozovskii 2).

<sup>141</sup> Women's prose is often confused with two popular genres dominated by female authors: romance novels and mysteries (*detektivy*) (Slavnikova 2000, 7). Even Ulitskaia has been the victim of such mistaken identity (Rovenskaia 2000, 64). Nadezhda Azhgikhina observes that female authors' leading role in the hugely popular mystery genre has greatly heightened the visibility of women per se and independent women characters in particular (2000, 63).

in their writing (181). Tat'iana Morozova argues that trivial pursuits and their happy resolution define the Russian romance novel, a genre conflating the feminine and low-brow (181).<sup>142</sup> For Bondarenko and Morozova, prose centering on women is a priori inclined to be derivative and unsophisticated. All these clearly negative assessments ignore Jim McGuigan's observation that high/elite culture "has always refreshed itself from the springs of popular culture" (1993a, 3).

Conflating women's prose and popular writing resembles Iurii Tynianov's conception: in "true" art representation should shape content and not be controlled by it. This viewpoint would assert that a story such as Tokareva's "Perelom" (Breaking Point) shows that *byt* can limit the narrative as everyday life molds the plot. The narrative relates how Tat'iana, a former figure skater, breaks a leg after fighting with her unfaithful husband. This work is closed within itself as details and events lead to one another but do not extend beyond the diegesis (Tokareva 1999, 208).<sup>143</sup> In Liudmila Ulitskaia's "Pikovaia dama," however, the realia of *byt* expand outward and hint at the other narratives and opportunities that are implicit for the protagonist in descriptions of Anna Fedorovna's books and letters. From this point of view popular writing is more imitative

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<sup>142</sup> Morozova (if not Bondarenko) would presumably distinguish the romance's simplistic "happy ending" from the numbing conclusion of *Vremia noch'*, in which Anna Andrianovna's quotidian worries give way to existential emptiness.

<sup>143</sup> In 1973 Vladimir Stepanov claimed that Tokareva's works are little more than *poshlost'* and romance—an accusation that only her post-perestroika corpus justifies (307). In 1992 Richard Chapple observed that the author was producing lower-quality, mainstream work, a shift more recently signaled by the major publishing house AST issuing her books with gaudy flowers on the covers (Chapple 1992, 119-20).

than creative, yet seeing women's prose as "popular" in this respect ignores the varying quality of works by female authors (e.g., the representational skill of Ulitskaia).<sup>144</sup>

There are several other problems with conflating women's prose and popular literature. The posited connection between gender and authorship is one obvious issue. In the 1990s men played a large role in mass genres, dominating the *boevik* (thriller) and also frequently writing romances under female pseudonyms (Morozova 178). In addition, the gap between high and low genres is not new. Critics who bemoan the decline of good reading dehistoricize the history of Russian and Soviet mass literature: there was a wave of enthusiasm for detective fiction first in 1905-08, then during the 1920s (the "Red Pinkerton") before it temporarily vanished during Stalinism only to reappear during the Thaw and Stagnation (Kuz'michev 223; Fedotova 234; Nepomnyashchy 162-63, 165).<sup>145</sup>

Those who associate women authors only with popular literature also ignore the success of an author such as Ulitskaia among both elite and mass readers. Anna Orlova's identification of

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<sup>144</sup> Medium is another distinguishing feature of post-Soviet literature. There are several prominent web sites that either reissue existing literature on-line or publish directly through the internet. One such site, *NaStoiashchaia literatura: Zhenskii rod* (Real Literature: Feminine Gender) <http://www.litwomen.ru/letter.html?pg=2> is designated for female authors. Many women's works also appear on the two leading on-line literature sites: *Vavilon* (Babylon) <http://www.vavilon.ru> and *Biblioteka Maksima Moshkova* (Maksim Moshkov's Library) <http://www.lib.ru>. Western Slavists have so far neglected the important role played by on-line writing, which is cheaper to publish and unites authors from the center and provinces.

<sup>145</sup> For an examination of television's treatment of the mystery and espionage genres, see Elena Prokhorova's "Fragmented Mythologies: Soviet TV Mini-Series of the 1970s."

“cheap melodrama” in *Iskrenne Vash Shurik* (Sincerely Yours, Shurik, 2004) ignores the privileged place of melodrama in high culture, e.g., Soviet classics such as Kalatovoz’s *Letiat zhuravli* and Vasiliĭ Aksenov’s *Zvezdnyi bilet* (A Ticket to the Stars, 1961) (Orlova 12; Prokhorov 48). She also neglects what Louise McReynolds and Joan Neuberger see as melodrama’s ability to connect everyday life with larger issues through “a uniquely accessible mode of analysis for audiences to perceive the interaction among politics, the arts, and everyday life” (5). While Shurik’s episodic sexual entanglements weaken the plot, they are only one level of a novel that uses its protagonist’s private life to critique the Soviet state—this tendency dates from Lidiia Chukovskaia’s *Sofia Petrovna* and reaches its apotheosis in Aksenov’s *Moskovskaia saga* (Moscow Saga, 1993) as a defining aspect of post-Soviet literature (Shneidman 1995, 39).<sup>146</sup> Orlova’s misdiagnosis echoes what Valentina Fedotova and Ivan Kuz'michev assume to be the result of lowered standards: Russian literature has abandoned its centuries-age “duty” to serious social commentary in favor of facile entertainment.

There are four reasons for Ulitskaia’s success with the intelligentsia and “ordinary” readers, which has implications for debates over high and low culture: 1. Subtle and nuanced engagement of the past (what in Chapter Four I term “history by indirection,” most evident in *Medeia i ee deti*), 2. Stylistic sophistication (a rich vocabulary, an abundance of metaphors, unusual sentence structure) within the realist mode of representation that dominated twentieth-century Russian prose (her writing is livelier than that of Grekova, yet more accessible than that of Valeriia Narbikova), 3. Artistic treatment of everyday life (the narrator’s fascination with the

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<sup>146</sup> Shurik is an eroticized version of Grekova’s nurturing and exploited Garusov. This coincidence of character types reveals the supportive male to be a continuing anomaly worth displaying in Russian literature.

details and small tasks that make laboratory work a joy for Tania in *Kazus Kukotskogo*). 4. Protagonists whose lives imply that one (perhaps even the reader) can live through difficult times while preserving ethical standards (Gulia in the story of the same name, *Medeia*). Ulitskaia's literary career to date shows that, despite critics' attacks, women writers need not worry about differences between elite and popular literature: talent and clever marketing can resolve such issues (Lesin <http://www.newsru.com>). Ulitskaia's themes, style, and intellectual characters link her to high culture, while the choice of Eksmo as a publisher came from a desire to reach a wider audience (Ulitskaia 2000, 5).

Ulitskaia's remarkably successful recent career upholds several assertions Helena Goscilo makes concerning the future of women's prose.<sup>147</sup> Her novels and stories signal an engagement with history, reduced idealism, and focus on the body as locus of trauma (Goscilo 2002, 309).<sup>148</sup> These tendencies are far from unique to this particular author—Ulitskaia has redefined themes that began emerging in the 1960s-70s (Grekova's hesitant treatment of Stalinist hypocrisy) and amplified during perestroika (Marina Karpova's link between Stalinism and rape). Imbedding this content in a rich and refreshing image of *byt* connects works such as

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<sup>147</sup> The first print-run of *Iskrenne Vash Shurik* totaled an astounding 75,000 copies, with the author's previous publications and Eksmo's tendency to reissue her works suggesting that more print-runs will follow.

<sup>148</sup> The sexually precocious Bron'ka in Ulitskaia's eponymous story evokes another trend Goscilo espies: the promiscuous and morally suspect "bad girl" heroine (2002, 309). However, it is the sensationalistic Mariia Arbatova who perfects this personage, fusing these characters to the autobiographical exhibitionism of works such as *Menia zovut zhenshchina* (They Call Me a Woman, 1997).

*Medeia i ee deti* to previous women's prose and provides a milieu made familiar by both male and female authors. Ulitskaia is in this sense a model for female authors: her career shows critics and readers how women's issues are both distinct from those of men yet inextricable from those of society as a whole.

Women authors first established the quotidian as a venue within which to legitimate women's issues, and then selectively depicted key moments within *byt* to highlight sharper social commentary conveyed through increasingly varied styles. This ability to adapt in a culture that has itself undergone dramatic changes suggests a viable future for Russian female writers—one that will preserve literature's status as social commentary while making it more inclusive of both male and female experience.



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